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ANNEX

8.1.13

THE

WORKS

OF

THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

LATE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A

REVIEW OF HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER,

BY BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

A NEW EDITION,

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

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SERMON I.

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Now therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider your ways.

THE faculty of reviewing our past lives and the present state of our hearts, in order to approve what is right, or condemn what is wrong in either, carries with it an evident obligation upon all men, to exercise it constantly and uprightly. It is a principle, that implies in its very nature an authority over the whole of our conduct: and we every one feel ourselves most intimately bound to obey its dictates. Even when we doubt in particular how we are to act, we must know in general, that we are to act as truth and conscience direct. And not to examine, what they direct, or whether we are following it, is transgressing the first fundamental law of moral agents. So that indeed God our Maker saith to each of us continually, by the inward voice of our own breasts, *Consider your ways.* A precept universally acknowledged, and highly honoured even by heathens: but peculiarly enforced on Christians, as it is not only often and solemnly enjoined in Scripture, but, to secure all possible regard to it, self-examination is incorporated into the most sacred rite of our holy religion (participation of the blessed sacrament), as its vast importance well deserved.

For in the midst of so many passions and appetites, as compose our frame; so many disorders in it, as we are born with; so many more, as we have superadded; such powerful temptations, as surround us on every side; we cannot hope, that the carefullest attention to ourselves will keep us entirely free from faults: but without such care, we shall fall into many more and worse; we shall go much greater lengths in them; we shall continue the wrong conduct we have once begun, blind to its guilt and peril, or only quit one error to adopt another; till we fix ourselves down in a confirmed state of sin and misery. By a little neglect of culture, a soil, so fruitful of ill weeds, will soon be covered with them: besides, that the best inclinations of the best minds, if left to themselves, will run wild and degenerate. And proportionably as persons are more exempted from the free admonition of others, the more certainly and dangerously they must err, unless preserved by a most vigorous use of their own self-reflections.

A duty, thus plain and thus necessary, God will doubtless expect us to perform very faithfully. And what the Almighty commands, we shall always find it our interest to do, never to omit. When we have acted amiss indeed, we must feel pain in thinking of it. But it is pain in order to a cure, which health and ease will follow: whereas the cowardice of not searching our wounds will inevitably make them fatal. In some of the most trifling affairs of life, we should think it strangely absurd not to observe, what we were doing. But how vastly more is it so, in the management of the whole of life; on which our happiness or misery depends, in time and to eternity!

We cannot bear perhaps to be so serious. But if we refuse it, sooner or later we shall assuredly be

driven to it. And never have there been in the world poor creatures so dreadfully serious, as they, who have resolved to be always gay and thoughtless. Terrors of mind, pains of body, perplexity of affairs, have come to be their hourly companions; till very often life itself hath grown insupportable to them; and they have desperately broken out of it, and even that in vain. Here or hereafter every one must think: will we then do it, while it may avail us; or when it can only aggravate our sufferings? Besides, persons of the greatest levity are serious in some points: as earnest, as they are capable of being, about matters that very little deserve it: and why not about the one thing needful?

But possibly we are not convinced that our behaviour is of such infinite and eternal importance. However, at least it is of importance to examine, whether it be or not. That inquiry can do us no harm: and it may do us good beyond conception.

But perhaps we have inquired, and think there is reason to doubt of what we are commonly taught concerning these matters. But when did we begin to think so? Was it before we had grossly sinned; or however, were pretty much resolved to sin, and wanted to be made easy in it? Or was it not in consequence of imagining, that an infidel way of thinking would give us a distinguished and fashionable air? If so, what chance was there, that our inquiry should be a fair one? It is not picking up from others, or inventing ourselves, a few jests and cavils, or even real objections against religion, that entitles us to say we have examined it: but an impartial thorough search into every thing, within our reach, favourable to it, as well as contrary. What authors then have we read, with what men of learning and

abilities have we conversed, on the religious side of the question? And with what sort of spirit have we done it? We have been caught, it may be, with somewhat, that appears ludicrous. But may not every thing almost be made to appear so to a light mind? We have been shocked perhaps by more solid difficulties. But are there not such in all parts of knowledge? Are there not much greater, in what infidels believe, than what Christians believe? Whoever looks closely into the matter, will find that their credulity beyond comparison exceeds ours. Or supposing, after some honest inquiry, we still doubt: have we not often doubted long, of what at last we found true? Would we tamely give up our title to an estate, or an honour, because a few suspicions were started about it, that we could not immediately confute? And doth not our whole title, to no less than eternal felicity, stand and fall with our religion?

But further: what do we doubt of? Not surely of all the articles of faith, and all the obligations of life. Have we then considered well, what the undoubted ones are, and how far they ought to influence our conduct? Whenever we do, we shall certainly find, that no one part of it can safely be vicious: and indeed, that there is not the least firm ground to stand on, between uniform piety and morals, and uniform profligateness and villany. If God and virtue are realities, we are bound to every thing which they require in every case. If they are not, we are bound to nothing in any case. Whoever then is shocked at the latter supposition, must take refuge in the former: and consequently see it his duty, to weigh all his behaviour deliberately and impartially.

We find it but too easy, if we will, to judge very favourably of almost the worst actions we have ever done. At least, between disguising them with false colours, and hurrying on to do and think of somewhat else, we can for the most part quiet, if not applaud ourselves: especially if others, above all, others of our own rank, are guilty of them without scruple. And even sins, that we thought heinous ones when they were just committed, after some time we grow to imagine scarce worth notice: as if distance lessened the reality of objects, as well as the appearance. But God sees every thing in its true light and magnitude: and surely then it is our concern to see it so too. For what can it avail us, to imagine pleasing falsehoods, when we are to stand so soon, indeed stand always, before a Judge who discerns the very bottom of our souls, and to whom a thousand years are but as one day?

Have we then examined, as in his presence, our lives and hearts? And by what standard have we tried their innocence or guilt? The practice of others can no more justify us, than ours can them. Mere fancy and inclination is no rule at all. And reason, if biassed, is next to none. Have we then really done our utmost to divest it of self-partiality, to enlighten it by the instruction of pious and judicious friends and books; and, above all, to direct it by the unerring word of God? The written laws of that cannot be moulded into what we please, like the variable arguings of our own minds: but will unmovably oppose our most darling passions, if they be wrong, and since our final state must be judged by it, surely our present ought too.

If then there be any persons, (and God grant there be not many here!) who have never duly obeyed his

great command of considering their ways; *to-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts* *. To-morrow may be quite too late: and at best every delay will make self-inspection more painful, and our condition more hopeless. But how carefully soever we may have searched into our breasts already, fresh occasions for it will be daily rising; and unless the repetition of it be frequent, we shall perform it ineffectually, and very soon leave it off entirely. The present season indeed is a yearly memorial of recollection and seriousness. But as the mere outward shew of it is of no value; so the more real goodness of a few weeks, if it end with them, is of very little. Our business therefore is, so to examine ourselves now, as to live more christianly ever after. And whence can we better begin, than from what we owe to Him that made us?

Do we then often think of him, and constantly reverence him, as the wise and good, the just and powerful, ruler of the world? Do we praise him for his mercies, pray for his pardon, protection and grace, not only now and then in public form, but daily in private, with a deep and awful sense of what we say before him? Or can we perhaps some of us remember when we prayed in secret and in earnest last? If not, why this neglect of the Author of all we enjoy, the Disposer of all we hope for? Can we think it meanness to honour him, even with the lowest submission? Do we think it meanness in our inferiors to pay due respect to us? If not, why in us to pay all respect to God? Will we then at least do it for the future? Resolving otherwise deliberately, comes very little short of renouncing and defying him; and dare we then go thus far? What

* Psalm xcv. 8.

would it deserve were we to treat an earthly superior so? What doth it deserve, if we treat the Lord and King of all so?

But besides worship, we owe him further, faith in what he teaches, obedience to what he commands. Have we then inquired with humility of heart, what doctrines he hath proposed to our belief, what laws he hath prescribed to our conduct, by reason or revelation? Or do we set up our own fancy and caprice for absolute judges of his declarations and appointments: indolently and securely determining, that this article of faith, or rule of life, be its evidence what it will, cannot come from him; and another, though it doth, ought however to give way to our private interest, ease, or humour? Could such treatment of human laws be borne? And will the Almighty and All-wise bear it? *Be not deceived: God is not mocked.*

But, how fully soever we own the authority of religion, do we practise it? What is our great aim and endeavour here? Is it to secure a happy immortality? or to grasp as many as we can, of the splendid bubbles of this momentary scene; to get a little more power, or wealth, or rank, and then, with unabated thirst, a little more still; even to the very night, that our souls shall be required of us? Whom do we think happy? the virtuous, the humble, the good? or the artful, the prosperous, the great? What do we rejoice in, or grieve at? Is it our proficiency or failure, in love and duty to God, in reasonableness of heart, uprightness of behaviour, disengagement from this trifling world? Are these the things we are concerned about? or a very different sort of advantages and pre-eminences, belonging to the present state of things entirely, and many of them quite

contemptible, even were no other to follow? When our duty and our interest thwart each other, how do we act? honestly and cheerfully give up the latter? or frame poor excuses for preferring it, or unfair contrivances for reconciling it, to the former? These are questions of the last importance. For if *the love of the world* be our reigning passion, *the love of the Father is not in us* *. Which do we choose then, earth or heaven? Let us not cheat ourselves, but speak it out to our own hearts.

Or, however free in this respect, do we live to no other passion, equally unworthy? Is not our principal view to be admired for some accomplishment, or applauded for some ability, of very little merit? And are we not led both into follies and sins, to obtain and increase a false kind of esteem from others, that will only tempt us to forget ourselves? Do we attentively distinguish, what is truly of value, and to what degree? in how many things of consequence we are deficient, in how few we excel? and *who hath made us to differ* † from the very meanest of our fellow-creatures? Are we willing, if need require, to be slighted and despised, hated and reproached, for the sake of acting as we ought? Or do we *love the praise of men* ‡, and *seek not the honour that cometh from God only* § ?

But, supposing we are clear both of worldliness and vanity, still what can we answer with respect to pleasure? Do we indulge none, that is condemned by impartial reason: or, what we are sure is impartial, the word of God? Every forbidden way of gratifying sensual desires, visibly produces many and dreadful mischiefs and crimes. Excess and intemperance ruin

* 1 John ii. 15.
† 1 Cor. iv. 7.
‡ John xii. 43.
§ John v. 44.

the healths, the understandings, the usefulness, the fortunes, the families, of men. Breach of chastity produces all the same evils, and extends them further: brings innocent persons into guilt and dishonour, under treacherous pretences of esteem and love; involves their innocent friends in distress and shame along with them, and occasions innumerable evils, private and public. But particularly breach of the marriage vow dissolves the very bonds of human society. For if faith and truth, solemnly given oblige not, oblige not both sexes, in this case, why do they in any other? Are we then innocent, in these respects; or have we repented; or do we despise the threatening, that *they, who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God* * ?

And, in regard to other indulgences, have we acted as becomes rational natures, designed to prepare ourselves, by the discipline of this life, for spiritual happiness in a better? Do we guard with care, against sinking into delicacy and indolence, against being dissipated amidst a hurry of gaieties, or lost in polite amusements and elegant trifles; or are we *lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God* † ? What proportion of our income do we spend in deeds of piety, charity, and proper beneficence? what proportion of our time, in the religious and moral improvement of our hearts, and the real duties of our respective stations? All the wealth we have, and every hour we live, we must account for. Can we do it with joy? Can we say we have been hitherto *working, while it was day, the works of him that sent us* ‡ ? If not, will we now reflect, how fast the night approaches?

Another very material head of examination, is that of our resentments. Do we bear ill-will to no

* Gal. v. 21. † 2 Tim. iii. 4. ‡ John. ix. 4.

one, for excelling or coming too near us in rank, in power, in favour, in fortune, in qualifications of body or mind? Are we offended at no one, for doing what he justly might, perhaps what he ought; or, at least, apprehended himself bound to? Have we inquired, with diligence and candour, into the truth and motives of the fact we are displeased with, and in effect heard both sides? Do we make all fit allowances for the merit, for the repentance of the offending party, for human infirmity in general? Do we never punish but when it is plainly needful; and never then, but by lawful means, and in a proper degree; never accuse, but when we have evident reason; and always confine ourselves in doing it to the *words of truth and soberness* *? We have been guilty ourselves of many and great faults both against God and man: do we forgive, as we hope to be given?

A further inquiry yet must be (an extremely comprehensive and interesting one), what is the tendency of our common discourse and conversation? Is it favourable to religion, to probity, to decency, to good-will among men, or the contrary? Doth it express dislike of wickedness and folly, though countenanced by fashion; or excuse, if not approbation, of whatever chances to be in vogue? Doth it show, that *in our eyes a vile person is contemned, but we honour them that fear the Lord* †? or do we love to palliate the sins of the former, and aggravate the failures of the latter? Have we indeed ever thought of rules on this subject? or said, *Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us* ‡? Yet licentious talk, of every kind, doth unspeakable mischief. We all complain of it, when we suffer by it. And when other persons, when society, when the honour of God, when piety and

* Acts xxvi. 25. † Ps. xv. 4. ‡ Ps. xii. 4.

virtue, suffer by it; there is evidently the same, there is often far greater, guilt in it. And, since our hearts are as much concerned in what we say, as what we do; the declaration is perfectly reasonable: *By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned* *. Which then shall *we* be?

But our behaviour must be recollected, not only towards our fellow-creatures in general, but with a closer view to the particular relations of life. If married persons, are we faithful, affectionate, considerate, mild, prudent? If children, do we make thankful returns for the care and tenderness of our parents; obey them dutifully; and pay them all that honour, which we shall certainly expect hereafter to be paid us? If parents, do we preserve towards our children a proper temperature of authority and condescension, and watch over and provide for those, to whom we have given being, so as may best secure their true happiness, and our own comfort in them, now and at the great day? If heads of families, have we due regard to the present eternal good of those whom we take under our roof; remembering that we also have a master in heaven? If servants, do we behave with singleness of heart, showing all fidelity, as unto the Lord, and not to men? As subjects, do we express, in word and deed, the reverence and the gratitude we owe, to those whom Providence hath put in authority over us? Whether our condition be private or public, do we act in it, unbiassed, to the utmost of our knowledge, by interest, prejudice, and partial affection? If employed in affairs, are we vigilant and upright, and studious, in all things, of the general good, as men *fearing God, and hating covetousness* †? If advanced to stations of eminence and

* Matth. xii. 37. † Exod. xviii. 21.

power, do we countenance religion, virtue, and merit; and discourage the worthless and profligate? or only wonder the world is so bad, when we have contributed to make it so: or conclude it can never be good, when indeed we have tried no means to reform it?

Further, in this situation, are we careful what sort of example we set others to copy after? and sufficiently apprehensive (for we can hardly be too much), that not only our sins, but our imprudences, actions that are imprudent only as they endanger others, may produce an incredible deal of evil in those around us and beneath us; whereas God expects all persons to be his ministers for good, in proportion to the abilities and opportunities, with which he hath intrusted them?

Nor should we stop at considering, what our faults have been: that alone would be a speculation of little use: but proceed to think what must follow from them. Indeed, have we not already some of us found our characters, our fortunes, our healths, impaired by them? or at least will they not of necessity in a little time? Hath not the happiness, we promised ourselves from our transgressions, proved very insignificant, or very short-lived? Have they not often brought upon us dreadful anguish and distress; and sometimes forced us into most destructive methods of trying to get rid of the torment of thought? Or, how joyfully soever we go on at present, yet the further we go, must not our return be more difficult; and unless we return, our end more deplorable? Nay indeed, will not the less blamable, the allowable indulgences of this world, if we pursue them eagerly, and live chiefly to them, exclude or wear out from our souls, those impressions of and attentions to serious

piety, which alone will bring us peace in our last hour? We can affect, it may be, to talk of death with much indifference; but have we in earnest brought it near to us, and considered what it is? an immediate passage, without recall, into that state, where small and great shall stand before God: who, as surely as he governs the world with justice and wisdom, *will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil* *, and recompense us all according to our use of every talent committed to us. Are we then prepared against that day? ready for the Searcher of hearts, were he to call us now to our final account? If not: do we reflect, how soon we may be called, how soon we must, and what the consequences will be for ever? Do we then at length resolve against all sin, all occasions of sin, all supineness and negligence from this time forwards? Are we unfeignedly sorry, that we have resolved it no sooner? Are we deeply sensible, that, in all we have done amiss, we have provoked a most holy God; and have no claim to pardon, much less to happiness hereafter, but through the mercy, procured by our blessed Redeemer? And will we accordingly fly to Him alone, with an humble faith in the atonement of his death, and the efficacy of his grace: or boldly hazard all, on the sufficiency of our own strength, which hath deceived us so often, and the imagined merits of our own righteousness, or our own repentance, imperfect and defective as they both are?

Think not any of these, harsh and ill natured questions: they are the very friendliest, that can be proposed. Think them not gloomy and melancholy inquiries: they are the ground-work of all true comfort.

* Eccl. xii. 14.

No one indeed hath a right to require an answer to them from another: but God hath full right to command, as he doth by his word and the preachers of it, that every one put them home to his own soul. They carry still more terror to those, who are bound by their office to utter them, than to those who sit and hear them: but terror inexpressible to all, who provide not to answer them well; and joy inexpressible to all, that do. *Let us* therefore conscientiously *search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord our God* *. Let us beg of him fervently, to show us what manner of persons we have been, are, and ought to be; and say to him, in the words which he himself hath dictated, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults* †. *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well, if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* ‡.

* Lament. iii. 40. † Ps. xix. 12. ‡ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

SERMON II.

2 COR. V. 21.

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

THESE words contain that great article of the Christian faith, that the death of our blessed Saviour hath obtained for us pardon, grace and everlasting life: which important truth is so strangely disregarded, even by many who call themselves his disciples, that I think it necessary

I. To confute the prejudices, that lead men to think slightly of their need of the satisfaction, which he made on our behalf: before I proceed

II. To explain and defend this part of the Christian doctrine.

I. Our condition with respect to God is infinitely the most important of all our concerns, for we are absolutely in his power alone: and the forgiveness of our sins is the most important article in that condition. Were we innocent creatures, we could only doubt, what happiness we had to hope for from him: and about that we might be, though not indifferent, yet free from anxiety. But as we are all guilty, the first question, and a very alarming one, is, what

punishment we have to fear? Thoughtlessness and partiality may indeed dispose us to imagine, that however right in speculation the laws of religion and virtue may be, yet in practice great allowance is due to inclination; this being as truly part of our nature as reason. And when persons find many others that seem to judge in the same manner, (especially if some of them be of that rank, which is admitted in most things to set the pattern;) then, in companies together they can go almost any lengths: decide in a moment, that this is superstition, and that preciseness; that such restraints are absurd, such others unnecessary; and take fancy and fashion, mixed together as it happens, for the only rules of life; without a single reflection whether they are acting as they ought; or the least apprehension, that if they are not, any harm will follow, provided they guard against a few present inconveniences. Yet many of these perhaps are people of conscience in some things: but in others, they despise all mention of it: and for the most part, if they behave tolerably well to their fellow-creatures, have scarce the notion of any duty they owe to their Creator: at least beyond the mere propriety of attending his worship now and then, in compliance with a custom, that is not yet quite worn out.

Now would but such men venture on a very safe thing, a little serious thought; they would soon perceive, that though inclination is a part of our nature, yet every inclination must not be gratified; for this would be mischievous both to all around us, and to ourselves: that therefore we ought to have some rule, which to indulge, and which to restrain: that fancy and fashion can never be the rule; for both are continually varying, and would often lead us to dishonour and ruin; that we have within us a natural sense of

right and wrong, which passes judgment with authority on our actions, frequently whether we will or not; and that, if it be in many cases obscure and weak, our business is to improve and strengthen it: that the great and wise Being, who hath made us and all things, must intend we should behave suitable to this consciousness, which he hath given us; and obey whatever commands he may think fit to superadd: that both his holiness and his goodness oblige him, as the sovereign of the world, to preserve due order amongst his subjects, by recompensing them as they deserve: for that some actions deserve well, and some ill, we every one of us inwardly feel.

Yet we are very apt to persuade ourselves, that it is beneath him to look so low, as the passions and follies of such inconsiderable creatures as we are. But I intreat you to consider: is there, upon earth, that creeping thing, that weed, that smallest particle of dead matter, which God hath not formed with inexpressible wisdom, and doth not govern by stated laws, which have all their force from the never-ceasing exertion of his power? And how can we doubt then of his governing the rational, that is, the noblest part of his creatures, by laws equally adapted to them? by precepts, rewards, punishments? What is there worthy of him to do, if this be not? But, indeed, he hath both assured us of his doing it, and we experience that he doth it. We perceive his injunctions and prohibitions within us: we pass his sentence on ourselves, when we do amiss: we undergo corrections of his appointment, when we suffer for what we have done: and by these specimens of his justice now, he warns us of the full execution of it hereafter. For if wickedness escape, and finally triumph, in one single instance, then is God no longer

infinitely perfect, but partial or impotent, like one of us. Earthly princes confine their care to the most important points, because attending to every point is, not below them, but above them. The nearer they can approach towards it, the livelier images they are of him, who *humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth* *, and who *numbereth the hairs of our heads* †, and weighs every thought of our hearts. Let not good persons be terrified at this: for *he knows whereof we are made, and is merciful to them that fear him* ‡. But let the inconsiderate, the rash, and the bold, learn from it, both to be cautious how they act, and to recollect how they have acted. We seem very commonly to think that the sins of our former days lose their guilt in proportion to their distance; and are gradually annihilated, as the impression of them wears out of our minds. But with God what is past is not gone. On the contrary, unless we entitle ourselves duly to forgiveness, it remains on record an indelible evidence, against that day, when *the books shall be opened, and the dead be judged out of the things which are written in them* §.

It greatly concerns us therefore to look back on all our faults, that we may see distinctly, what our true condition is. Probably enough, on a superficial inquiry, the verdict may be highly to our advantage. But our business is to make a thorough search, and know the reality: by placing before our thoughts, (after composing them into a serious temper,) first the several rules of a godly, righteous, and sober life, made known to us by reason and Scripture; then our own conduct under each head. Whoever hath not examined thus, has need to begin immediately:

* Ps. cxiii. 5, 6.
† Matth. x. 30.
‡ Ps. ciii. 13, 14.
§ Rev. xx. 12.

and whoever hath, will have need to repeat his work frequently from time to time. But the present season is peculiarly appropriated to pious recollection. If therefore we contrive methods of running away from it now, we too plainly signify our intention of neglecting it for ever: and if those contrivances be public and professed ones, we offend against common decency, as well as religion.

In the performance of this duty, we ought by no means to accuse ourselves falsely: but it would be a fatal mistake to flatter ourselves: to overlook or extenuate the faults we have committed, or fancy, that be they ever so bad, we could not help it, and others have done worse; and nothing remains, but to be easy about the matter. How many soever have done amiss, they shall all account for their doings; for numbers of criminals can never change wrong into right; and judging the world is no harder to God, than condemning a single person. He hath notified his will to us all, by the light of our own consciences, by the revelation of his holy word, by the instructions of other religious books, by the private admonitions of our friends, by the public warnings of his ministers. He hath given us much more strength to perform our duty, than we use: he is ready, on our humble request, to add to it as much as we want. And in these circumstances it can never be a slight matter, if, in any one instance, we have been disobedient or negligent towards him; have unjustly hurt or disregarded any of his creatures, our brethren; have corrupted or debased our own natures; and behaved unsuitably to the condition in which he hath placed us, or the spiritual bliss for which he hath designed us.

We are strangely disposed to consider some trans-

gressions, as being subjects of mirth only. But in truth every departure from the rule of right, and the commands of our Maker, is a thing of great moment: and what we are pleased to imagine trifling, were it not for custom and self-partiality, we should see to be of great consequence. We are also extremely apt to think our faults more important in almost every other view, than as they offend God. And yet the direct contrary is one of the plainest truths, that can be. For as all we enjoy proceeds from him; as our happiness or misery depends entirely upon him; and every bad thing we do, (whomsoever else it may injure or not,) is always injurious to his authority, and hateful to his holy nature; he is evidently beyond all comparison the person, whom we are continually to have most in our thoughts, whose favour we should chiefly desire, whose displeasure we should chiefly dread. If therefore we have acted amiss, (and who hath not, in more and greater points, than he is willing to allow?) barely acting otherwise, without regard to God as interested in the case, can never be enough. Till we feel a deep sense in our hearts of the unworthiness of our behaviour towards him, we are far from becoming inwardly what we ought: and unless we keep alive and strengthen that sense, by humbly and frequently expressing it to him, with earnest desires of his pardon and grace, and hearty endeavours of amendment, we neglect the methods of reconciliation and recovery, which reason itself points out to us.

There are so few brought thus far in religion, that very possibly the first natural thought of a great part of them may be, that nothing farther can be wanting to procure them forgiveness and future happiness. And it is very true, that we can do no more, not so

much indeed, without the divine interposition. But it by no means follows, that this will be enough, even to save us from punishment, much less to obtain us reward; and least of all the unspeakable reward of everlasting life. As the laws of God are just, he may justly inflict the penalties of them on transgressors. As he is the moral governor of the universe, he must support the honour of his government throughout his creation. Human government can never be supported, without making a great difference, in many cases, between penitent persons and innocent ones. Whether the divine can or not, we none of us know: for the extent of it is boundless, and we are acquainted but very imperfectly with so much as our own small part. Even in this, we see, that by the constitution of things, which God hath appointed, repentance often avails not at all, and often very imperfectly, to prevent the bad effects, in this world, of our faults and follies. And how shall we be sure, that the same kind of rules, which we experience to take place here, may not also take place hereafter? Whatever therefore God shall reveal to us concerning these matters, we ought to receive with implicit reverence: and use with the utmost thankfulness any method, which he shall inform us is necessary, or expedient, in order to avoid the ill consequences of our sins, though possibly we perceive no manner of connexion between the remedy and the cure. Nor shall we in so doing pay any greater regard to the all-wise God, (though unspeakably greater his due,) than we pay continually, and should be inexcusable if we did not, to our poor ignorant fellow-creatures, whom we trust, full as implicitly, with our fortunes, our healths, and our lives.

What then hath God taught us concerning our case? That neither such repentance, nor such reformation, as we are capable of, will suffice to obtain us forgiveness and eternal happiness. For he hath ordained farther means for these ends: and he certainly would not without cause; especially such extraordinary means, as those in the text: which I have purposely deferred to mention, till, having shown you, that pardon is the great thing we all want, and cannot of ourselves secure, I might dispose you to embrace with a more joyful faith that reviving assurance, that *Him who knew no sin, God hath made to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* And this doctrine I now proceed

II. To explain and defend.

The natural and obvious meaning of these words, interpreted jointly with innumerable other passages of Scripture, is; that our gracious Maker, being desirous perfectly to relieve mankind both from the original bad effects of the fall of our first parents, and the personal guilt of our own transgressions; but perceiving, in his unsearchable wisdom, sufficient reasons not to do it on such confessions and submissions only, as we were able to make; appointed, that his ever-blessed Son (who voluntarily condescended to engage in the merciful work) should take upon him the likeness of sinful flesh; and bear, for our sakes, inconveniences and sufferings, from which otherwise the dignity and the purity of his nature entirely exempted him; that he took upon him the form of man, not only in order to teach the doctrines and exemplify the practice of true religion, which men had almost forgotten; but also to undergo that painful and ignominious death, which he foresaw wicked persons, offended by his reproofs, would in-

flict on him: that this consent of his *to be made sin for us*, to be crucified as a malefactor on our account, foreknown from eternity, our heavenly Father hath been pleased to consider as a sin-offering made to himself; an acknowledgment, on our behalf, of the ill-desert of disobedience; a satisfaction, in our stead, to the honour of his justice; and an inducement to bestow on all, who shall qualify themselves for receiving it, such full pardon, as else they could never have had. Thus by *making him to be sin for them, he makes them the righteousness of God through him*; that is, on account of Christ's yielding to be treated as a criminal, he treats them as no longer criminals; giving them joyful proofs here of his protecting providence and sanctifying grace; and raising them up hereafter from the universal sentence of death to the blessed enjoyment of eternal life.

This is so evidently the tenor of the whole New Testament, that no one could ever have entertained the least doubt on the subject, but for the seeming difficulty of reconciling some part or other of it to his own apprehensions and notions: which surely, in a matter so far above our reach, we have little cause to trust to, against the express declarations of Him who knows all things. It implies no absurdity in the least. Guilty persons cannot claim forgiveness, nor innocent persons everlasting happiness, as matters of right, but of mercy and favour only. Now God is not less merciful and favourable to his creatures, if he provides on purpose a particular method for bestowing these blessings on them, than if he did it without such a provision. Nay, indeed, more mercy is shown in making such a provision when it is wanted, than could be shewn were the case better. The goodness of God appears eminently, in propos-

ing and accepting, what nothing but goodness could induce him to propose and accept: the goodness of our blessed Lord appears equally, in executing the gracious design by such condescensions as we read in the Gospels, particularly of this week: and the goodness of the Divine Spirit, in applying the whole, by his inward operations, for the benefit of our souls. That one person should undergo pains and hardships for the sake of others, and a good person suffer many things to prevent the misery and promote the happiness of bad ones, is so common in lower instances, that though we could not have expected, we may well believe, this high degree of God's love towards us, *that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* *. We see not indeed fully, how his death produces our salvation: nor do many people ever know, how the steps taken by their friends for their pardon or advancement proved effectual: yet they are not the less effectual on that account. But thus much however we see daily, that from regard to the services and sufferings and intercessions of some persons, others have favours done them, very wisely and justly, which else neither wisdom nor justice would have permitted. And why then should it not be a fit recompense to our blessed Lord, (as undoubtedly it must be the most acceptable one possible,) for what he so cheerfully undertook and went through, that mankind to whom he had made himself related, in so extraordinary a manner, with so amiable an intention, should be treated the more kindly on his account? that, to speak in the language of the prophet †, *when he had made himself an offering for sin, he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, by the knowledge of himself justifying*

* Rom. v. 8. † Isaiah liii. 10, 11.

many? For observe, no one will ever be accounted righteous for his sake, who doth not in fact become righteous by his means. And rewarding his incarnation and death, by putting sinners into his hands to be made happy, on condition that he should first make them holy, pious, and virtuous, doth no less honour to the justice of God, than to his mercy.

And how little soever we apprehend the reasons of what Heaven hath done towards our deliverance; yet as we must perceive the fitness of all that we are to contribute towards it, repentance, faith, and obedience, we know very fully as much as we need. They, who never heard of the interposition of Christ, may possibly receive some benefit from it, on a general application, that God will be merciful to them in such a manner as he shall think proper. But of us will be required an explicit petition for that mercy which he hath offered, in that form which he hath directed. And if, instead of this, we will rest our cause solely on the footing of our own righteousness, or our own repentance, imperfect as we know, or easily may know, they both are: if we refuse to acknowledge that efficacy in the death of our blessed Saviour, which he and his Apostles have ascribed to it: from what cause soever this proceeds, other than excusable mistake; whether from a slight opinion of the desert of sin, from a high notion of human virtue, from unwillingness to confess obligations, or from the mere pride of these poor shallow understandings of ours, claiming to know every reason that God hath for his actions, while yet we know completely no one thing around us; it is a presumptuous neglect, full of guilt. And one motive for making our salvation dependant on another, and the manner of his obtaining it for us incomprehensible

to ourselves, might well be, to check that swelling vanity of our hearts, which is the parent of almost all our sin and misery, and to teach man *to walk humbly with his God* *.

Let us therefore thankfully accept his mercy, just as we find it offered to us, and learn to own, that we *have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus* †.

* Mic. vi. 8. † Rom. iii. 23—26.

SERMON III.

JAMES ii. 10.

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

FEW persons, I apprehend, have either read or heard these words, without being in some degree shocked at them, and looking upon them as *a* very *hard saying**. For though, from reverence to Scripture, we may endeavour to keep down what rises in our minds, yet no wonder if we feel a strong reluctance to believing, that he, who transgresses in some things, is guilty of others in which he doth not transgress; and so by running into one extreme becomes chargeable with the opposite: which, it must be owned, this passage, upon the first view of it, appears to affirm. But then we ought to remember, that in all discourses, upon all subjects, many things occur, which are by no means to be understood according to the mere sound of the words, but according to the nature of the matter in question, the visible intention of the writer or speaker, and the use of the language. And more especially short sentences and maxims, whether of religion, morals, or prudence, ought to have this allowance made to them: because they are often purposely conceived in terms, the obvious meaning of which alarms men; that so their

* John vi. 60.

attention may be excited more effectually to that hidden wisdom, which, on farther inquiry, it will be found they convey. Now the assertion before us is a Jewish maxim, found in several of their ancient books, written since the times of the Apostles, and therefore probably enough used before their time, when a controversy amongst them, of which we have footsteps in the Gospels, might easily furnish an occasion for it.

They had a law, of which the precepts, adding the ceremonial to the moral, were very numerous. The observation of all these, though adapted with great wisdom to the circumstances, in which they were placed for so many ages, was found very burdensome. And therefore some of them had begun to persuade themselves, and teach others, that a strict obedience to which ever part they pleased was sufficient; or, to express it in their own words, that *God gave so many commandments to them, that by doing any of them, they might be saved**; by which they meant at least any great one; and hence in all likelihood arose the question, *which was the great commandment in the law*†? A doctrine of so pernicious consequence as this, we may be sure, while there was any regard to truth left, would be strenuously opposed. And it was natural, that the contrary doctrine should be expressed by the teachers of it in the strongest manner

* Pocock on Hos. xiv. 2. from Ikkarim, l. 3. c. 29. In hunc ordinem recipiunt quemvis antiqui, qui ob unicum tantummodo præstitum preceptum, non rejiciens interim cætera, sed ea approbans, meretur nomen Israelitæ. *Men. Ben. Isr.* de Resur. l. 2. c. 8. p. 181. But then he saith, l. 1. c. 6. p. 43, 44. that the ancients held, they were first to suffer for their bad deeds, then to be rewarded for their good deeds; but still all Israelites were to be finally happy, unless they disbelieved Providence, the law, or the resurrection.

† Matt. xxii. 36.

they could well invent. Now such undoubtedly is that of the text, which may seem indeed to have overdone the matter not a little. But the limitations, belonging to it, were probably well understood by every body then. And therefore all that St. James needed, in writing to the Jewish Christians of those days, was to confirm it by the sanction of his authority; though in our times it is requisite to explain, and guard it against mistakes: which also he hath greatly assisted us in doing.

For, that he never designed in the least to affirm, that being guilty of one sin would make men's condition as bad, as being guilty of ever so many, we may be very sure; not only from the monstrous unreasonableness of such a notion, and its inconsistence with what the other parts of Scripture have expressly taught; but from hence also, that were this the case, all sinners whatever must receive an equal condemnation; and yet he himself, in the very first verse of the very next chapter, speaks of some, that *shall receive a greater condemnation.* Since therefore this could not be his meaning, let us proceed

I. To consider, what it was, or might be.

II. To draw suitable inferences from it.

I. To consider, what it was, or justly might be.

And here, *offending in one point* must of necessity signify offending wilfully: for through ignorance, inadvertence, or surprise, *we all offend in many things,* as this very epistle tells us *: yet we cannot think, the text was intended to bring every person under the guilt which it mentions. And therefore we are not to understand it of such offences, but of presumptuous and habitual sins, that whoever breaks the law *in one point is guilty of all.*

* James iii. 2.

Again, offending in one point, may mean either offending in some one of singular importance, or in any one, great or small. There have been persons, who, taking it in the former sense, have understood the one point to be that of mutual love, which St. James just before *, as well as St. Paul †, says, *is the fulfilling of the law.* And as the whole law of social life *is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* ‡, he, who offends in that one, will certainly be guilty of all, since all depend on that §: and however strictly the outward acts of each may be performed, the inward spirit of them cannot be preserved. But if it be thought rather, that *offending in* any *one point* whatever was meant by St. James, then we must inquire somewhat farther, to know, what the last words, *guilty of all,* can signify. They certainly carry an appearance of astonishing severity. And yet there is no necessity of understanding them to be any thing more than a strong expression, (for all the eastern people expressed things very strongly) importing, that whoever is thus blamable, is greatly blamable, and liable to a heavy punishment. There is one passage in St. Matthew particularly, which will show this in a clear light: I mean that, where our Saviour tells the Jews, that *on them should come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias, whom they slew between the temple and the altar.* Nor was he content with saying so once, but repeats it immediately, *Verily I say unto you, all these things shall*

* Ver. 8. † Rom. xiii. 10. ‡ Ver. 9.

§ Merito fit omnium reus, qui contra illam [charitatem] facit, ex qua pendent omnia. *Aug. ad Hieron.* See also the Life of St. Erkenwald, in the Appendix to Dugdale's History of St. Paul's, p. 8.

come upon this generation *. What could he possibly mean here? Not literally, that any of the Jews should be punished on account of the murder of Abel; for they did not so much as descend from his murderer: nor that any of that generation should undergo the sentence of God for what another generation did: but, as their wickedness, especially in persecuting him and his disciples, was, and he foresaw would be, incredibly great, he designed to say in the most forcible manner, that their punishment should be so too: and to raise, if possible, their conceptions of it high enough, he purposely uses terms, which, if taken strictly, would be too high; and speaks, as if every innocent man, that had ever been put to death, should have his blood required at their hands. Nor did he alone venture on such forms of speech. St. John hath exactly the same, where he saith, that *in Babylon was found the blood of all that were slain upon the earth* †. This may seem to us taking a strange liberty: but it was familiar to the Jews: their own writers since are full of it; and abound in sayings, which they intend only for bold figures, and the ignorant mistake for gross absurdities. Indeed all languages have more or less in them of this kind: only we overlook it in our own, while we are shocked at it in others. To say, that a man hath done all the mischief, or suffered all the misery, in the world, is so common a way of speaking, that perhaps we shall be surprised, upon recollection, to find it quite as strong, as the beforementioned ones out of Scripture. Just in the same manner, then, as the Jews of that one age were to bear the punishment of all the righteous blood, that had been shed in all ages; the wilful breakers of one

* Matt. xxiii. 35, 36. † Rev. xviii. 24.

commandment incur the guilt of breaking all the commandments: that is, their crime is very great, and their condemnation shall be in proportion. For they, who offend but against a single precept, yet if they do it deliberately and habitually, which, you have seen, is the case here supposed, are doubtless faulty to a much greater degree, than such as offend against more, but less frequently, and without design.

Had therefore the words of the text been true only in this looser sense, they had still, considering the genius of the eastern style, been very justifiable. But indeed there is much further truth in them. For *guilty of*, may mean liable to; the Scripture saith, *guilty of death* *, as well as of sin: and then, *guilty of all*, may mean, liable to all the punishments denounced by the law, in his proper degree. Or though we suppose the phrase to signify, as it seems to do, guilty of breaking all the precepts of the law; still, when any person presumptuously transgresses one part, his guilt in some measure extends to the whole. For the whole of God's law is but one system, and every part of it connected with every other; so that, if any is broken, all are weakened. The whole of piety and virtue is but one disposition of mind, one uniform principle of doing what is fit: and if what is unfit may ever be done; there can be no reason assigned, why it may not always be done †. Farther yet: the lawgiver's title to command, from which the law derives its whole force, this too is one and the same throughout: and if he hath not a right to be

* Matt. xxvi. 66.

† The simile of Max. Tyr. diss. 31. § 2. edit. 1740, though applied somewhat differently by him, is applicable to this purpose also. Ωσπερ γαρ εν ταις των μελων αρμονιαις, το παραλειφθεν, κἀν σμικρον ᾖ, διαλυει τον κοσμον τȣ μελȣς, ȣτω κἀν τῃ τȣ βιȣ αρμονιᾳ· κ. τ. λ.

obeyed in every article, he hath no right to be obeyed at all. The observation, that follows in the verse after the text, is perfectly just: *he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill:* nor is there a higher regard due to him in one case, than in the other. Whoever therefore denies the obligation of any precept, which he admits to be a precept, disowns the whole authority of God at once: for he hath not a jot more in the rest, than he hath in this; where he is allowed none *. Or if a person only refuses to obey a commandment, which he thinks is not one: yet, if his thinking so proceeds from his unwillingness to think otherwise, it may be a near approach to the same guilt: for at this rate, he may reject them all, if he dislikes them all. Nay, supposing he doth not set himself to disbelieve his duty, but is prevailed on by temptation to neglect some part; yet then, he not only might, with just as good reason, neglect every part, but probably it is from no principle of conscience, that he performs any. Attention to his interest, or want of inclination, may keep him good in most cases besides: but if the fear of God, or love of virtue, were what kept him so, one should think it would have kept him from one sin, as well as from another. And therefore he that violates any divine command, it may be feared, is guilty in the rest, which he observes, of not observing them on such grounds as he should: which, to the purposes of religion and his own future happiness, is too near akin to not observing them at all. For if an

* The Talmudists observe this particularly concerning a denial of the sabbath. התורה כולה הכופר בשבת כאילו כופר בכל *Aben Esra* gives the reason: for he denies the creation. Seld. de Jure Nat. et Gent. l. 3. c. 10.

action, which would otherwise be a good one, is done from a motive, that hath no good in it; this cannot be the service that God requires. And on some of these accounts perhaps it is, that Tully affirms, in words pretty like those of the text, that whoever is destitute of any one virtue, is possessed of none *.

But I would not be quite so rigid neither. There are doubtless but too many inconsistent persons, much to be pitied, and often in several particulars to be esteemed, that show a true and great regard to their duty in some things, while in others they are enticed to act very ill. These now are not the most highly faulty, but still really faulty, with respect to the whole of God's law. In those branches, which they transgress, there can be no question of their guilt: and in those, which they observe, they are guilty at least of laying in their own way grievous temptations to transgress them. For the indulgence of any sin strangely leads men at all times, and almost forces them at some times, into the commission of many more, which possibly they little thought of: till at the breach, which appeared small and harmless, there rushes in a torrent, that overwhelms every thing right in them: and thus by *offending in one point*, they too frequently become, in the strictest sense, *guilty of all* †. Their guilt, indeed, as to these latter sins, is not complete, till they have committed them: but it began, when they brought themselves

* Ecquid scis igitur—virtutem—si unam confessus sis te non habere, nullam esse te habiturum? Tusc. Disp. lib. 2. § 13. edit. Davies. Where see other authorities in the notes. See also de Fin. 5—23.

† Si fatereris scienter januam incendisse, si unum signum, puto, tota domus intelligeretur ex parte. Nec enim quisquam omnia incendit, sed unam aliquam partem, ex qua surgat in omnia se sparsurus ignis. Sen. Excerpt. Declan. lib. 5. controv. 5.

first into the hazard of committing them. And even should they be so happy as to escape, running into danger is no small misbehaviour.

Another fault of theirs, with respect to such parts of God's law, as they do not personally break, is, that their example of offending in some points encourages the world around them to offend in other points. For if you indulge the vice which you like, why may not they indulge the vices they like? And thus, though you are guilty of practising but one sin, you are guilty of promoting the practice of every sin; and will share in the crime, and consequently in the punishment, not only of what you directly do, but perhaps of what you abhor, because you have been the occasion of others doing it.

But there is still a sense left, and a very interesting one, in which the words of St. James are true. *The royal law*, that he mentions just before the text, and refers to in it, is plainly the law of the kingdom of Christ, that is, the Gospel. Now the Gospel terms of salvation are, that whoever sincerely, though imperfectly, observes the whole of its precepts, is entitled, through faith, to its forgiveness and rewards: but if a person is wilfully guilty of any one sin, so long as he continues in that state, *Christ shall profit him nothing* *. For, even supposing him pardoned before, that pardon was but a conditional one, and cannot become absolute, till the time of his trial is over. Every presumptuous transgression opens the account anew, which repentance and amendment had closed; and makes him a debtor once again, for every thing that he hath ever done amiss. Read but the parable of the unmerciful servant, in the 18th chapter of St. Matthew, and you will be perfectly satisfied

* Gal. iii. 2.

of this truth. Indeed the very reason of the thing shows, that whoever performs not all the conditions of the Christian covenant, is entitled to none of the benefits of it: but though his case shall doubtless be equitably considered, and with due allowances to his former virtue or penitence, yet it shall not be considered as coming under the promises of the Gospel; but he remains chargeable, though not with any thing he hath not done, yet with every thing he hath done. And which of God's commandments is there, that we have not, at some time, in some degree, wilfully transgressed? This therefore is a very important sense, were there no other, in which he, who offends in one point, is guilty of all.

You see then, how entirely justifiable this passage of St. James appears, when well examined. And the chief things, to be remembered concerning it, are these. He doth not mean, that committing one sin makes our condition just as bad, as committing ever so many. But he may reasonably mean, that being vicious in any respect weakens and endangers our virtue in every respect: that deliberately breaking God's law, but in one case, implies in it a denial of his authority in all cases; and not only, in just consequence, may, but daily, in fact, doth, produce an universal disregard to him, both in ourselves and others: nay, supposing the mischief to stop far short of this, yet that a failure in any single condition of the Gospel covenant precludes us from all the rewards, and in a degree proportioned to the greatness of the failure, will bring upon us all the threatenings of it. Let us therefore now consider—

II. The inferences, to be drawn from the words, thus explained; which are two.

1. Since it is neither affirmed by St. James, nor

true in itself, that the guilt of any one sin is equal to the guilt of ever so great a multitude of sins: there can be no encouragement in the world for the wicked to run on into still more wickedness; but, on the contrary, next to becoming uniformly good, their most serious interest lies in lessening the number and measure of the things, in which they are bad. Too commonly, when once men are fallen into the practice of a sin, either it requires another to conceal or support it, or a second wrong inclination claims the same right to indulgence as the first, or uneasy reflections drive them to seek for consolation from irreligious principles, or loss of reputation amongst the virtuous reduces them to court acceptance at any rate they can have it, among the vicious. And though they are sensible, that all this plunges them deeper, yet their reasoning is, that any one sin, if the Scripture be true, makes their case desperate, and ever so many can do no more: that, if they are to be miserable hereafter, whoever ventures upon the thing, it is errant absurdity in him to be solicitous about the degree of it, and live in a state of perpetual inconsistency, neither hoping at all for the rewards of virtue, nor enjoying freely the pleasures of vice. Now undeniably this sort of conduct is a folly, and there is only one sort greater: but that is the very one, of which you make choice: resolving to do amiss in more points, because you do amiss in some; and to make your condition as much worse as you can, because it is a very bad one already. If the misery, which God will inflict hereafter, is to be feared, surely an increase of it is, exactly in proportion, so much more to be feared: and in such a case as this, a large increase must be expected. There may be excuses pleaded for falling into some faults:

but there can be no excuse for adding others to them wilfully. There may be hope of amendment, while you are gone but a little wrong: and perhaps you please yourself with the thought that you shall amend: at least the time may come, when that prospect, if you could entertain it, would be a pleasing one indeed. Why then, in the meanwhile, will you be needlessly deviating farther and farther; and laying daily new obstacles (some of which may prove insuperable) in the way of your own return? Possibly indeed you may utterly despise such considerations as these, and think it great bravery to do so. But it is an unwise bravery. You are not certain, you cannot be certain, that either immorality or contempt of religion are safe things. And if they are unsafe, the less you are guilty of either, the better. Were a future account only possible, it ought to put you under no small restraints: but how much greater, if it be probable, if it be certain? It is very true, the only behaviour that will secure you thoroughly, is keeping clear of every thing bad. But at least do not go lengths, to which you are not tempted: do not go every length, to which you are tempted. If you will be debauched, why will you be injurious too? If you will be both dissolute and dishonest, why need you be profane also, and scorn and ridicule virtue and piety, as well as neglect them? Or, on the other hand, however you act in relation to things of the next world, why should you abandon yourself to profligateness and folly in respect of this, and be wretched before your time? Fear not in the least, but there will be guilt and mischief full enough in those kinds and degrees of sin, from which you imagine you cannot abstain: so that you will have no occasion to increase the list of them wantonly.

And be assured, that however painful it may be to retreat, or stop short where you are, going farther on will be much more so, probably in this life, but assuredly hereafter. For if God will at all distinguish then between good and bad (as he must and will, if he be just, or wise, or true), he will as certainly distinguish, and to purpose too, between bad and worse.

But absurd as it would be to reckon one sin as dangerous as many (against which, notwithstanding, it was needful to give a strong caution, because the text, at first sight, may appear to favour it), still the opposite error is equally absurd, which yet, in spite of the text, the whole Scripture, and the plainest dictates of common reason, great multitudes will persist in; that, I mean, of thinking, or acting as if they thought, that since every one is peculiarly inclined to some fault or other, he will be dispensed with in that, provided he performs but the rest of his duty tolerably well. And therefore,

2. The principal inference, to be drawn from St. James's words, is, that no one sin whatever can be wilfully indulged, without forfeiting our salvation. Indeed if it could; if our obedience may safely fail just where alone it is, properly speaking, tried; that is, where we find ourselves peculiarly tempted to disobey; what proof do we give of any regard to virtue, or what must become of the interests of it in the world? Few people have above one or two faults, to which they are much addicted: so that allowing them these, is allowing them all; and giving them leave to be as wicked, as they want to be. Or supposing they have several bad inclinations; yet, if one of them is to be forgiven, because it is a favour-

ite; why not the rest, if they can make the same plea? And further, if your faults are to be overlooked in the day of judgment, why not the different faults of every one else? One person is prone to intemperance, another to lewdness, a third to falsehood and dishonesty, a fourth to malice and revenge. If inclination, and constitution, and what we are pleased to call nature, is to be a warrant for any of these, why not for all? But you will plead it perhaps only for small sins. And so one is indulged first, because it is but a little one: then another, because it is not much bigger: and where shall we stop, or in what will this end? Every one's sin is small in his own opinion, and none is so in reality. For, be it in what instance it will, disobeying our Maker, violating our consciences, and breaking through the sacred bonds of truth and duty, can never be deemed a slight matter, nor will it hereafter be found so.

But is there no allowance then to be made for human weakness, and the strength of temptation? Undoubtedly great allowance in all such failings as we watch and strive and pray against, and persevere in opposing. But then, whoever doth this in earnest, will certainly gain ground of his failings; and therefore whoever gains little or no ground, doth not do it in earnest. Wishing now and then that we were better, being grieved a little when we think how bad we are, and, in a sudden fit of goodness, making a faint essay towards reformation, and laying it aside again: this is far from performing, what, by the assistance of Heaven, we might, if we would. And whoever can think that no more is expected of him, must think at the same time, that God hath very

little attention to the observance of his laws, and that his laws are of very little use towards the government of the world.

All persons therefore, who have a proper regard to some branches of their duty, but not to others, ought seriously to consider, that they are doing a great deal, without doing any thing to effect, for want of doing the whole: that it must be peculiarly grievous to them in the next life, to come so near the kingdom of heaven, and yet to fall short of it; to be *almost*, but not *altogether, Christians* *. Since they take pains to correct part of their bad inclinations, it cannot but be worth their while to correct the rest. Either it will not be very difficult, or the difficulty will not continue very long, or the reward will be very ample. And whichsoever is the case, it must evidently be their interest to make their lives consistent, their characters clear, and their hearts easy, by *walking in every ordinance of the Lord blameless* †: for *so shall we not be confounded, if we have respect unto all his commandments* ‡.

But then we must ever understand this, not only of moral duties, not only of the duties of natural religion, but of revealed also: and particularly of that great and leading commandment, *that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ* §: believe in him practically, as well as speculatively; believe in him as our Redeemer and Mediator, no less than our instructor: trusting in his merits for pardon and acceptance; in his grace for strength and comfort; and seeking to *be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of God,*

* Acts xxvi. 28, 29.
† Luke i. 6.
‡ Psalm cxix. 6.
§ 1 John iii. 23.

by faith *. For we have all offended in every point: and having recourse to this one, of penitent faith in Christ, working by love, is our only cure for past sins, our only means of future obedience. *By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified* †; but *whosoever believeth in him, shall not be ashamed* ‡.

* Phil. iii. 9. † Rom. iii. 20. ‡ Rom. x. 11.

SERMON IV.

ROM. xii. 3.

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly accordingly as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

THESE words express the duty of humility so accurately, and carry in the very manner of stating it so full and clear an evidence of its obligation, that one would hope no man could read or hear them, without being convinced, that he ought to do what they enjoin.

There are directions of Scripture, concerning this matter, which some pretend to be impracticable, and unfit to be practised: as where St. Paul himself exhorts, *in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves* *; and St. Peter, *all of you be subject one to another* †. In relation to such passages it hath been pleaded, that, were every one to think thus, many must think falsely; which we ought not to do if we could, and for the most part, in this case, cannot do if we would, but only pretend to it hypocritically: that men would be inwardly prouder and outwardly more troublesome, with this affected humility, than without it ‡: that the mockery of a

* Phil. ii. 3. † 1 Pet. v. 5.

‡ Ο γαρ ὑπο ατυφιᾳ ‖ τυφος τυφομενος, παντων χαλεπωτατος. M. Antonin. l. xii. § 27.

‖ Ὑπο ατυφιας, vel επι ατυφιᾳ. Gat.

mutual submission in every thing must fill human life with perpetual embarrassments; and whilst every one insisted upon obeying, no one would be left to rule or preserve order *.

Now the absurdity of such behaviour indeed is very glaring. But for that reason the Apostles are not to be understood, as they need not, in a sense that gives encouragement to it. Practical writers on religious and moral subjects, considering how hardly the generality are brought to entertain sufficiently strict notions of their duty, purposely express it sometimes in words which, taken literally, would be too strict. For abatements more than enough will not fail to be made; especially in such favourite points, as that of the good opinion, which we have of ourselves. But in these two apostolical injunctions, only a very moderate abatement is wanting. We are to esteem others better, or superior to us, not in things where we know they are not, but in things where we may justly suppose they are. And perhaps there is no person, or however no pious and good person, and to such the Apostles wrote, but hath the advantage of us in some particulars; or at least, from our fuller acquaintance with our own defects, may, on probable grounds, be apprehended by us to have it. Or if not, yet *esteeming* them such, may, according to a frequent use of the original word so rendered †, mean only treating them as such. And though we must no do this by making hollow and deceitful professions of inferiority; yet we may do it, by concealing and waving.

* Celsus affirmed unreasonably, that Christians had learned their notions of humility from Plato misunderstood. *Orig. against Celsus*, vi. 15.

† See Job. xiii. 24. xix. 11. xxxiii. 10. xli. 27. 29. Phil. iii. 7, 8. See also a Letter in the *Nouvelle Bibliothèque*, Sep. 1742.

our claims to superiority: not *being subject one to the other* on all occasions indeed, but on all proper ones, which are more than a few. It cannot be, that either of the Apostles should intend to carry the duty further; because both of them acted in stations of authority themselves, and prescribed rules to others how to act in them. But it is peculiarly impossible that St. Paul should run into such an extreme: for he hath distinguished very exactly the obligations proceeding from the different ranks and improvements of men, which implies, that they must be conscious of them. And if he had given no other proof of his understanding the nature of humility aright, the text alone affords a strong demonstration of it.

For what doth he there say, *through the grace given unto him,* in virtue of the dignity graciously conferred upon him, *to every one amongst us,* for our direction in this behalf? Only, *not to think of ourselves more highly, than we ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith:* that is according to the real degree of piety and virtue, which, through God's mercy, our faith in Christ hath produced: or rather, taking the word, *faith,* in a less common, but more suitable meaning, according to the real value of the several talents, which God hath entrusted to our faithful management.

This we must allow to be a most equitable way of stating the duty in general. And therefore it may be hoped we shall proceed, with willing minds, to examine more particularly,

First, What manner of thinking concerning ourselves; and

Secondly, What manner of acting towards others,

our obligation to humility, thus explained, requires. The former of these I shall consider now; the latter, God willing, hereafter. At present then let us inquire, how we ought to think of ourselves. And,

1. We ought plainly not to think, that we are possessed of any other good qualties or advantages, or any greater eminence in them, than in truth we are: which yet is a point, that we frequently misapprehend. Self-love, an affection inseparable from us, tempts us to be wonderfully easy of belief in our own favour; and extremely slow to discern, and industrious to disguise even to our own view, whatever tends to lessen us. Then, as for the information, which we might receive from others, whoever hints the least thing, which is not for our honour, we suspect immediately must do it, if not from ill design, yet at best from want of judgment: and, if we can but find a shadow of probability for either suspicion, we soon conclude, that only malice or ignorance can find fault with us. To confirm which persuasion, we see perhaps the generality of our acquaintance treat us with marks of considerable regard: and this we interpret as a most undeniable token that we deserve it all; though perhaps it arises merely from their civility, and desire of living well with us. Or it may be our case is yet worse: and we are misled by persons, who from bad motives make it their business to fill us with extravagant notions of our own accomplishments and pre-eminences. The rich and great indeed suffer most by these wretches; and therefore should above all be on their guard against them. But persons of every degree, down to the very lowest, have their flatterers. And even the grossest flattery is commonly believed: but if it be conducted with any art, it seldom fails.

And in fact, from one or other of these causes, into what astonishing errors, about their own qualifications, do we see people fall!

The instances are numberless, were no others to be mentioned, of persons deluding themselves in the most important of all points, the state of their souls: mistaking uncharitable zeal, or lifeless formality, or enthusiastic transports, for true religion; or bad-tempered rigidness, or prudential regularity, or constitutional good-nature, for true virtue: saying inwardly, as the Revelation of St. John expresses it, *I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and not knowing, that they are wretched and poor and blind and naked**. But in such matters also, as others are apt to value themselves upon, how established an observation is it, that, from things of the greatest importance down to the veriest trifles, almost all the world are continually judging wrong of their own title to esteem; and vain of imagined excellencies, where at most they do but equal those about them, or perhaps are peculiarly deficient! We can easily remark this in our neighbours: but we strangely overlook it in ourselves; and forget, that their failings are only those of human nature; to which, with the same nature, we are just as liable, and it may be full as guilty of them.

Some few indeed, through excess of modesty, or weakness of spirits, or strength of temptation, fall into the opposite extreme, of diffidence or even despondency. And these, were they to *think soberly* and justly, would think better of themselves; to which they ought to be excited with the most compassionate earnestness. But the general caution, to

* Rev. iii. 17.

the rest of us, must ever be, not to think too well: to make sure of abating sufficiently from what they who pay court to us, would suggest; and attend to the less favourable judgments concerning us, that others pass; not to bear them the least ill-will on that account; but solely to learn that knowledge of ourselves, which we are happy, if we learn any way. The best of outward monitors indeed is a faithful and prudent friend; if we have such a one, and will permit him to act as such. But the main article is, that each take care to be his own friend; by studying his own qualifications impartially, and as one bound in conscience to be an upright judge. *For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work* *.

2. Having examined, what our qualifications are, the next point is to settle the true value of them. For one person is proud of what another despises: and therefore we have done nothing, till we have fixed, what things deserve esteem, and in what degree.

Now indisputably the strongest claim is that of a pious and benevolent and reasonable disposition, expressed in a suitable behaviour. This, however disregarded by a thoughtless world, is the *one thing needful* †: the ground-work of private and public, of present and future happiness. The human heart, notwithstanding its degeneracy, loves and reverences it, even though unwillingly, wherever seen: superior orders of beings look down upon it with complacency, and God himself approves it, as his own resemblance. To this character then let every one aspire, who seeks true honour, and place nothing in competition with it. *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory*

* Gal. vi. 3, 4. † Luke x. 42.

*in his wisdom; neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him, that glorieth, glory in this; that he understandeth and knoweth me; that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord**.

But then we may value ourselves, even on this acknowledged excellency, much too highly. For indeed a temper and conduct of unmixed obedience would be no more, than plain reason and common sense dictates. And therefore our Saviour's precept is absolutely right: *When ye shall have done all those things, which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants,* that is, we have merited nothing: '*we have done that, which was our duty to do* †. Right behaviour is only what ought to be expected: wrong behaviour is the thing to be wondered at. And therefore when any one admires and is astonished at his own goodness, in all likelihood he is but lately and imperfectly become good; and holds himself in such account for what he doth, either because he doth it with difficulty, or because he understands but in part what he ought to do. For they who act from confirmed habits, act with ease; and imagine, that others would of course do as well and better, being very sensible of their own failings. Or however perfect the self-applauder may be in the eyes of men, his *heart is not right,* but far from it, *in the sight of God* ‡: nor will he have taken one single effectual step towards the kingdom of heaven, till he is filled with a deep sense of his own sinfulness, and unworthiness to be accepted, otherwise than through him, *who of*

* Jer. ix. 23, 24. † Luke xvii. 10.
‡ Acts viii. 21.

God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord *.

If then we may think too favourably of ourselves even for our piety and virtue: how much more for other qualities, which are good or bad only as they are employed!

Some insist greatly on their high birth, or distinguished rank. And unquestionably honour is due to all superiors; and especially to those, whose ancestors also have been of remarkable note and worth: which their descendants may be successfully excited to imitate, by seeing it thus respected. The education of such too should be of the best kind. And therefore we readily presume on these accounts, that their dispositions likewise are noble and generous, like the blood which runs in their veins, and the company which they are qualified to keep. But still this is only presumption. When it proves true in fact, they are the supports and the blessings of society. But when the contrary happens, though whatever submission their station requires, or prudent custom hath allotted to them, should be carefully paid; yet they ought to be very sensible of the essential distinction between external deference and inward veneration; and properly reminded, if there be need, how much more honourable it is, to be a wise and good person one's self, than to be sprung from ever so many; and to be useful in the lowest condition of life, than mischievous or insignificant in the highest.

Others claim to be valued on their superior wealth. And in case it was acquired by laudable methods, and is applied to beneficial purposes, their claim in its degree is just. But if they have gained it by

* 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

fraud or extortion or servility; if they abuse it to the service of luxury or vanity or oppression; or withhold it from those to whom reason and religion direct them to impart of it; the poorest wretch on earth, with an humble and contented and honest heart, is unspeakably worthier of esteem than they.

Another foundation of self-complacency with some is their dexterity in business, and carrying on the designs which they form. But of what sort are their designs? What ways do they take to attain them? Are their acquaintance and neighbours, their country and mankind, the better or the worse for their abilities? If *the wise in their generation* * cannot return good answers to such questions as these, they must not expect very sincere congratulations from others on this notableness of theirs; and sooner or later they will find but little comfort in it themselves.

A more innocent claim to reputation, for the most part, is that of superior knowledge and learning. Yet *science, falsely so called* †, may be pernicious beyond any thing: especially that horrible sort, which dissolves the ties of religion and morals, and supplants the hopes of eternal happiness. Yet there are persons, who can be vain of it. But even true knowledge deserves our praise chiefly in proportion to its usefulness: and the most useful of all, being that which is the most common, affords but small ground for over-weening self-opinion. Besides; the more we really know, the more conscious we shall be how imperfectly we comprehend things, and how much there is left behind, of which we are ignorant. When therefore St. Paul saith, that *knowledge puffeth up*, he means imaginary and misapplied knowledge. For he adds, that *if any man thinketh that he knoweth any*

* Luke xvi. 8. † 1 Tim. vi. 20.

thing, that is completely, *he knoweth nothing yet, as he ought to know* *. And such conceited fancies, making men negligent and rash, and prompting them to despise the judgments and reasons of others, lead them into perpetual errors.

As for the other temptations to pride, which prevail with the gay and thoughtless, it would scarce be proper to say more about them from hence, than to beg they would reflect, how short-lived and precarious, how trifling and ridiculous, the things often are on which they, in good earnest, plume themselves: how few have ever been lastingly the happier for them even in this world, beyond which they cannot extend; how many have been betrayed to eternal as well as temporal ruin by injudicious fondness of excelling in them. So important is it to proportion our affections duly: for want of which, multitudes are proud of their vices, and *glory in their shame* †.

3. After this we must proceed to examine, what deductions are to be made from the value of our accomplishments and advantages, on account of our deficiencies and disadvantages. For till we have balanced the one against the other, we can no more judge of our own merit, than we can of our wealth, by casting up the sums, which are in our possession, or due to us, without stating what we owe. One immoral, mean, or disagreeable quality, may obscure the lustre of many virtues and ornaments. Nay, some faults may give so unhappy a turn to dispositions very laudable in themselves, as to make them do harm, instead of good: and much more then may those which are of a nature indifferent, or valuable only in a lower degree, be so perverted. Unless therefore we search into this matter, we shall in effect

* 1 Cor. viii. 1, 2. † Phil. iii. 19.

know nothing of ourselves. And as it is yet more mortifying to acknowledge things which make against us, than to quit our pretensions to those which make for us; without the utmost care, we shall certainly decide partially in our own favour on the present head. But

4. Supposing that danger avoided, a further direction, equally needful, is, to be cautious in comparing ourselves with others. This we are commonly in so much haste to do, that it plainly shows, which of the scales we design beforehand shall preponderate. Now judging too harshly of others, both injures them, and may greatly mislead us: judging at all of them is but seldom needful: and usually judging right is very difficult. Their circumstances and characters are often unknown, often purposely misrepresented. Modest secret merit is frequently the greatest: and qualifications, not so shining as ours, may be more beneficial. They, who have considerable defects, which we have not, may be free from as considerable ones, which we have; or be endued with virtues, which may amply compensate for them. If we resolve to compare, we ought to make allowance for every thing of this kind: and provided we make it duly, we may begin our comparisons as soon as we please; but shall perhaps have more comfort in letting them alone. For if we begin, we must not think to stop at those instances, where we previously know the result will be such as we like. Most persons may find some, or many others, beneath them, in birth, fortune, influence, agreeableness, understanding, temper, morals. But it would be generally full as easy, if it were but near so pleasing, to meet with many more, greatly above them in these respects, without seeking extremely far for it. Now, if we make the

comparison only with such as we despise; it is a poor pre-eminence to be superior to the despicable. If only with such as are just about us; we lie open to St. Paul's reproof, of those, who *measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves, are not wise* *. And if we extend our enquiry to a greater distance, we may quickly discover numbers, to whom we shall be tempted to look up with envy; and they to look down upon us, if we are known to them, with pity or contempt.

But, even on the supposition that we could maintain a rank, in our several pretensions, amongst the foremost of mankind; yet there remains,

5. Another most material point to be considered, What is man? Still we should find ourselves poor, helpless, frail, short-lived wretches, liable every moment to lose every thing that is valuable in us, and suffer every thing that is dreadful to us. Still the imperfections that we have in common with the basest of our kind, would make up a far greater part of our condition than the advantages that exalt us above them. And *why is earth and ashes proud* †?

But if it be needful to make us more fully sensible of our low estate, let us lift up our thoughts to those numberless hosts of celestial natures, whose perfections, though finite, are yet beyond our conception, much more our attainment: and to whom probably the first of men bears no greater a proportion than the creeping worm to one of us. For indeed, if we do but reflect how little we are removed from the brute creation; how like them we are in our make, our wants, our passions, our follies: there will be cause to think, that we are the meanest of rational animals, barely deserving the name: above whom

* 2 Cor. x. 12. † Ecclus. x. 9.

there are innumerable orders and worlds of beings, each rising beyond the other; and yet the highest immensely distant from that One, before whom they are all *less than nothing and vanity* *.

What then are we? Were we underived, were we independent, yet our whole race, and the whole earth we tread on, is a trifle in the universe, that makes no figure in it, and would scarce be missed out of it. But indeed the low existence that we have, and the little pre-eminences that belong to each of us in it, are not from ourselves, but owing to the bounty, and held by the pleasure, of another. All our natural powers and accomplishments are the work of his forming hand: all our outward advantages are appointed by his providence: all our improvements in goodness flow from his grace. *Who* then *hath made thee to differ from another; and what hast thou, which thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it; why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it* †?

But a still more important consideration is, that we have received whatever we have, not as a gift to be used in the manner we please; but as a trust, to be employed for our own advancement in piety and virtue, for the benefit of our fellow-creatures, for the honour of our Creator; to whom we must shortly render an account of our stewardship. The more hath been committed to us, the more we have to answer for: and not one of us is able to answer otherwise, than that in a greater degree or less, (God grant it be not a very great one!) we have neglected our duty, committed sins, and abused every talent put into our hands.

If then we will *think of ourselves soberly, and as we*

* Isa. xl. 17. † 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ought to think, we have abundant cause to think with the utmost self-abasement: instead of unprofitable and misleading comparisons one with another, each to compare our own hearts and lives with God's holy laws: and being thence made sensible how much we need his mercy, submissively to apply for it, in the method which he hath prescribed, through the merits of our blessed Redeemer, *taking His yoke upon us, and learning of Him to be meek, and lowly in heart: for so shall we find rest unto our souls* *: being *all subject one to another, and clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble* †.

* Matt. xi. 29. † 1 Peter v. 5.

SERMON V.

ROM. xii. 3.

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

EACH of the virtues which God requires us to practise, may be considered, either as being seated in our hearts, or exerted in our behaviour. That which the text enjoins, taken in the first of these views, consists in forming a right judgment of our own qualifications, rank, and circumstances. If any one hath already no more than a just opinion of these, he hath no need to lower it. But because we almost universally conceive too high notions of ourselves; condescending to entertain and act upon true and reasonable ones, hath acquired the name of humility or lowliness. And our obligation to be humble in heart, comprehends the following particulars: that we never imagine ourselves to have any pre-eminences or accomplishments, that we have not; nor esteem such as we have beyond their undoubted value: that we attend to our own faults and deficiencies, no less than the things in which we excel: that we be not fond of comparing ourselves with others; and, that, if ever we do make such comparisons, we make them

fairly, and with proper diffidence; and extend them to the persons by whom, and the cases in which, we are likeliest to be outdone: that we often call to mind the meanness, the frailties, the infirmities, the uncertainties of our mortal state; the immense numbers of known, and probably of unknown, orders of beings, adorned with glories, though finite, yet far beyond human conception; and the absolutely boundless perfections of our and their Creator: to whose voluntary gift what any of us enjoys above another, is owing: who can deprive us the moment he pleases, of our most favourite advantages; and will demand from us one day a serious account of the use that we have made of them; which the best of us all must be sensible, and few of us, if any, are sensible enough, hath in many respects been a wrong and a bad one.

This then is the first part of humility; bringing down to real truth the exalted imaginations, that are strangely apt to get possession of us. The remaining one, after thinking reasonably and modestly, is acting so. But in order to this, two previous rules must be observed.

1. The first is, to keep always in our minds the right estimation, which we are now supposed to have formed of ourselves; and especially to remember the mortifying parts of it: for the others we seldom forget. Some persons, indeed, are addicted, above all at some times, to look only on the dark side of things, and they should be directed with prudence to dwell proportionably on the more cheering views. But the sole caution which the generality need is, to moderate their fondness for the pleasing employment of contemplating the advantageous part of their own characters or circumstances. And every one, the

greater bias he perceives in himself that way, for he may soon perceive it if he will, should apply the greater watchfulness to correct it.

2. The second rule is, that, be our rank amongst our fellow-creatures, in any respect, as low as it will, we must accommodate our minds to it, and never indulge any fraudulent affectations of seeming superior to what we are. All persons indeed, not only should improve themselves, but may also mend their situation, by every lawful method they can. And so far as mere silence in the mean time is a concealment, it is a very innocent one. But to talk or behave unsuitably to our condition, in order to make a better figure than we have a right to make, is by no means allowable: nor even to be inwardly disturbed at its being such as we find it. Our present station is what the providence of God hath for the present placed us in: and who are we, to say or think it is beneath us? We are not to choose the part that we shall have to act on the stage of life: and if we are wise, we shall be glad that we are not. Well may it suffice, if, whatever is assigned us, we acted properly. Doing this with cheerfulness, we shall be *acceptable to God, and approved of men**: whereas, he who labours to procure honour by cheating the world with false appearances, will be always uneasy in himself, and soon detached and despised by other men. So that indeed to live in a lie is no more prudent than lawful.

Resolving therefore to preserve constantly in our thoughts what we really are, and be contented not to pass for more; let us examine, what behaviour must appear to us, in such a state of mind, ration-

* Rom. xiv. 18.

ally humble; first towards our superiors, then our equals, and lastly our inferiors.

I. To our superiors in any kind, evidently we ought to pay, readily and freely, all that submission, which is their due: and if we perceive within, a reluctance to acknowledge their superiority, or an eagerness to dispute the degree of it, we should mark that for a sure indication and bad symptom of pride.

One sort of pride there is, almost too shocking to mention, of which yet the human heart is frequently guilty: pride against God. This we shew in a dreadful manner, when we can hardly condescend to humble ourselves before him, and worship him; or seem ashamed of the homage that we pay him: when we take upon us to choose, which of his laws we will obey, and which not: when we vainly pry into the secrets, that he hath hidden; or presume to despise, either the plainness, or the mysteriousness, of what he hath revealed: when we venture to commit sins, in confidence that our imagined virtues will compensate for them; or treat the Gospel terms of forgiveness, through the merits of a crucified Saviour, as too degrading: when we ascribe to ourselves the good actions, which he enables us to do, or the prosperity, which he grants us to enjoy; or at any time express or conceive indignation at his disposal of the affairs of his own world. As the humility, which we owe to our Maker, is beyond comparison the deepest; so must a failure in it be unspeakably the most criminal. Therefore let us watch over ourselves in this article with the utmost care.

And, in the next place, as to our earthly superiors: whatever persons have authority over us, more or less, let us willingly pay them the obedience, and

the respect, which belongs to their station; accepting with all thankfulness the benefits, that we receive from their superintendence; and making such equitable allowances for their mistakes and frailties as we, in the same circumstances, might perhaps have much greater need of, than we can easily imagine: *not exercising ourselves in matters, that are too high for us* *; nor fancying, that every one is qualified and situated to judge of every thing. Whatever persons are in rank above us, though without authority, let us give them all such demonstrations of honourable regard, as may prove our acquiescence in the distributions of a wise, though unsearchable providence, as may strengthen the subordinations, which are necessary in society; and procure us a return of good-will and esteem. Those who have either naturally better understandings, or a larger share of acquired knowledge; let us pay, not an unlimited, but a reasonable deference to their judgments, and take pleasure in learning from them. Those who are noted for piety and virtue; let us reverence and love them, and make them our patterns. In a word: whoever hath any pre-eminence of any sort, our duty is on all fit occasions to own it, both in word and deed: not with artful contrivances to depreciate what we profess to recognize; but with such fairness and simplicity, as we should expect ourselves.

II. Towards our equals, humility of behaviour consists in shewing, that we are satisfied to live with them on equal terms; *being kindly affectioned to them with brotherly love, and in honour preferring them* †, as the Apostle exhorts, a few verses after the text: not demanding the respect, that we dislike to pay again; but setting the example of courteous and

* Psalm cxxxi. 2. † Rom. xii. 10.

obliging demeanour: not insisting, that our humour or interest should be more regarded, than that of others, who have as good pretensions; but submitting, for the sake of peace, to whatever, with tolerable convenience and propriety, we can: not seeking to engross, and confine to ourselves, the esteem, the friendship, the good offices of every one; not complaining, whenever another is preferred to us, though by one who hath full right to do as he pleases; nor, even if the preference be unjust, resenting it, as a more heinous crime for our being the sufferers, than if it were a different person; but bearing with the faults of our fellow-creatures, as we hope to have them bear with ours. All these things are so plainly equitable, that perhaps we can scarcely believe, that we ever fail to observe them. There can be no harm however in a little self-inspection upon the subject. If it confirm our good opinion of our own conduct, it will give us great delight: if not, it may do us great service, by leading us to amendment.

III. Humility of behaviour towards our inferiors, on which I shall chiefly enlarge, must be differently expressed in different cases. For some kinds of superiority ought not to be concealed, but supported and exerted. Parents, masters, magistrates, rulers, and officers of all kinds, would offend against their duty, were they to make their authority insignificant by too large or unseasonable condescensions. Their humility therefore consists in acting as persons, intrusted with power, not for their own sake, but that of others: in assuming no greater dignity, than is manifestly requisite for good ends: in joining with it always humanity and affability, and continuing, in the midst of it, to know themselves: in procuring diligently, and hearing impartially, true information

and faithful advice: being reasonable in their commands and expectations, moderate in the burthens they impose, merciful in the punishments they inflict; and in *watching* over all committed to their care, *as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief* *.

But, where pre-eminence carries no authority along with it, an humble mind will be very backward to claim it; for seldom any desirable effects will follow, and often many bad ones. It may not only give needless pain to others, which ought never to be done, but incite them to envy and ill-will, produce contentions and injuries. Most persons are uneasy at seeing themselves in a state of inferiority: and therefore both good-nature and prudence forbid us to remind them of it without necessity. If we are acknowledged to be superiors, humility, assisted by a little discretion, will contribute much to perpetuate the acknowledgment. And if the case be doubtful, haughtiness is by no means the way to procure a determination in our favour. People are not willing to let that be extorted from them by overbearing violence, which, if left to themselves, they would have granted with pleasure, and invited us to accept, as an equitable tribute. Finding any one take upon him, without a call to do so, alarms every one: they know not how far the matter will be carried; put themselves on their guard, and set up pretensions in opposition. And, if the question comes once to be tried by popular opinion, the world, we know, is exceedingly apt to judge wrong, especially when provoked to it. And if, after all, the point should be given against us; what a superfluous disgrace shall we have brought down upon our own

* Heb. xiii. 17.

heads, by indulging a spirit, the most incapable of bearing disgrace that can be! Solomon's counsel therefore is full of wisdom. *Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame* *. But indeed success, in a competition of this nature, may be altogether as hurtful, as disappointment: by inspiring men with a vanity, which may prove the parent of many sins and follies; may expose them to much ridicule, and bring them also into more serious inconveniences.

Nor must we avoid only such open and gross claims of superiority, but the indirect one of an assuming air and manner: which some have, to so strange a degree, that they neither do nor say any thing, without intimating their own importance. Indeed our very expressions of civility may have insolence mixed with them: for what is it less, if instead of treating those unaffectedly and frankly as our equals, whom we ought, whether absolutely such in all respects or not; we take pains to signify to them politely, that we have the goodness to stoop beneath our rank, in order to put ourselves on a level with them? Nay, were we in no way to claim regard from others, but in the most submissive and insinuating way to court it; yet scarce any thing is remoter from true lowness of mind, than that behaviour, which most solicitously disguises itself under the appearance of it, and enables us to climb by creeping. Or even supposing neither interest nor advancement to be our point, but applause only: still, both acting from a view to gain it, and taking too much pleasure in the consciousness of having gained it, are snares highly dangerous to humility.

* Prov. xxv. 8.

And many a man, of otherwise virtuous dispositions, hath by this one weakness, of delighting in his own praises, been corrupted insensibly within; and brought to deserve an extremely different character from that which he coveted.

But to return. If concealing our superiority be for the most part right; resenting a delay, or even refusal, to acknowledge it, must be exceedingly wrong. Other persons may very innocently be ignorant of our merit; may have no concern to inquire about it; may be no judges of it; or may be, on the other hand, better judges than we; and perceive that we over-value ourselves. But suppose they mistake, or, yet worse, are unwilling to do us justice; we are so liable to the same failing, that we must forgive it each other of course, or there can be no longer any peace upon earth.

But farther: as no displeasure should be expressed towards our inferiors on such occasions, no contempt should be expressed towards them on any occasion. The distance is not so extremely great between the highest and lowest of men: besides that they, who are inconsiderable in one respect, may deserve highly in another; perhaps more than he, who despises them. Indeed no one is truly despicable, but for his wilful follies and sins: and the sight of these ought to give us concern, instead of triumph; especially as we have all too many of our own. But for the rest, be the outward circumstances of others ever so mean, be the defects of their persons or understandings ever so remarkable, the Disposer of all things might have placed us originally in a condition full as wretched, and may even still reduce us to it. Therefore *laugh no man to scorn in the bitterness of his soul: for there is One, which humbleth*

and exalteth *. Yet how needlessly and wantonly do persons often make their inferiors, especially in rank and fortune, suffer by their slighting and over-bearing usage of them, both in words and actions! for an insolent word, or even a haughty look, is enough to cause bitter affliction to him, that knows he must bear it, whether he deserves it or not. And when, to speak in the son of Sirach's language, *the rich man hath done wrong, and yet he threateneth withal; when the poor is wronged, and he must intreat also* †; the more helpless the condition is, the more severely the injury is felt. For people of the lowest class have by nature just the same sensibility that others have. And if others would reflect how painful the feeling of such ill usage is, they would surely scruple inflicting it on their fellow-creatures; as not only barbarous, but ungenerous: for all the good uses of subordination might be as well, and much better, secured by gentler means.

But superiors too frequently consider those beneath them as worthy of no attention; and their most serious concerns of life as things to be played with, and sacrificed to every caprice. Now this is one of the most pernicious kinds of pride. Let any one think ever so much too highly of himself; so long as he keeps it to himself, or only gives out a few slighter intimations of it, though he is very blamable, yet he is tolerably harmless. But there are many who crush their inferiors under their feet, without minding them; though perhaps from principle, such as it is, they would behave to one of their equals in a quite different manner. But so far all men are equal, that the meanest wretch on earth hath the same right to live unmolested and free from in-

* Ecclus. vii. 11. † Ecclus. xiii. 3.

sult as the greatest monarch. And the elevation of one above others, far from authorizing him to trample upon them, strictly binds him to show humanity and afford protection to all those whom Providence, by putting them under his power, hath entitled to his patronage.

This then is the conduct, which humility requires of superiors. And to preserve it steadily, they should call to mind every day, that the world was not made for them alone, to gratify their vanity or love of pleasure, to indulge their humours, or pursue their advantages, whatever becomes of the rest: but with intent that each of them should contribute faithfully in his station, as well as others in theirs, to the common benefit of the whole. For God hath created all men of the same nature and the same blood: and united them by strong inward ties of sympathy and mutual tenderness, which it is both impious and unnatural to break or loosen. *If I have withheld,* said Job, *the poor from his desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; if I did despise the cause of my man-servant or my maid-servant, when they contended with me: what then shall I do, when God riseth up; and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me make him? and did not One fashion us in the womb* * ? We, that are so fond of exalting ourselves above those of our own species, who are equal to us in most things: preferable, it may be, in many; and beneath us only in accidental circumstances; do we consider before how awful a Superior we stand all the time? One that *accepteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor: for they are all the works of his hands* †. But, happily for the universe, his infi-

* Job xxxi. 13—16. † Job xxxiv. 19.

nite greatness is inseparably joined with infinite mercy and bounty: which blessed union is the very ground of the worship that we pay him, of the honour and love that fills our hearts at the thought of him. And what is it then, that deserves love and honour amongst men? Surely to imitate this adorable goodness of Him, who *is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens*: who *yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth* *. *For though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but as for the proud, he beholdeth them afar off* †.

Let us therefore delight in showing ourselves, by all fit proofs of condescending benevolence, the true children of our heavenly Father, and the true disciples of our gracious Redeemer; who hath made us all members of one, that is, his own body: and whose rule it is, *Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many* ‡. The same lesson, of not disdaining the very meanest offices of kindness one to another, when occasion requires them, he taught his apostles, and through them all his followers, in a manner so unspeakably engaging, just before his death, as one of the farewell demonstrations of his tender affection to them; (for so the evangelist puts it;) conveying his meaning the more expressively, as the eastern custom was, by an outward action, peculiarly fitted to exemplify it: that I shall read you almost the whole passage, as the best conclusion that can be made to a discourse on the present subject.

* Ps. cxiii. 4. 6. † Ps. cxxxviii. 6. ‡ Matth. xx. 26, 27, 28.

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father: having loved his own, which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, he laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself. After that, he poured water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. And after he had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet: for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord: neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them *.

* John xiii. 1—17.

SERMON VI.

PSALM XC. 12.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

THERE are not many subjects recommended so often from the pulpit to your serious consideration, as the shortness and uncertainty of human life: indeed there are very few, that deserve it so well. For our business is, not to entertain the curiosity of our hearers with learned discoveries, refined speculations, or uncommon remarks; but to remind them continually of such truths as are most useful to direct their practice by mending their hearts. And how impossible soever it may appear, that any one should be ignorant of some of them, yet if men will forget or neglect them, and live as if they knew them not, they must be still repeated and inculcated. The wisdom of our gracious Maker hath provided, that the greatest part, not only of our duties, but of the motives to perform them, shall naturally and frequently suggest themselves to our minds. And amongst the latter, one should think there was none more obvious, more unavoidable, than the consideration of our own mortality. But as those objects which are continually present to our senses, are apt for that reason scarcely to effect us more than if they were absent: so this truth, being fa-

miliarized to us by daily examples, about which we are indifferent, makes almost as little impression upon us as if the case were otherwise. It is a fact, which we have no doubt of, and no pleasure in: we therefore turn our thoughts to somewhat else, with such unhappy success, that, though the consequences of it are the most interesting to us all, that possibly can be, multitudes of us live, as if we neither believed nor suspected any thing of the matter. When indeed the voice of exhortation, or the unexpected decease of a friend or acquaintance, forces us to attend, we acknowledge for that moment, and perhaps with some concern, that we must expect to die soon: but quickly proceed again to act, as if we hoped to live for ever. And therefore it was a wise prayer of Moses, that God would condescend to help our infirmity in this important point. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.* Or, as the words may be translated, without any material change in the sense: *teach us to number our days thus;* to count them as the preceding part of the Psalm had done, like the *sleep* of a night, *like the grass, which in the morning flourisheth, but by the evening is cut down and withered:* or again, *Teach us to number our days aright; and we will bring,* that is, in order to learn, or, *we shall acquire, an heart of wisdom.*

The expression of *numbering our days* carries in it an implication, that they are not many. For in Scripture, as being *without number* denotes a large multitude *, so the contrary phrase hath of course the contrary signification. Thus, when Moses mentions the continuance of the cloud only a few days upon the tabernacle, it is in the Hebrew *days of*

* Gen. xli. 49. Numb. xxiii. 10. Judges vi. 5. vii. 12. 1 Kings iii. 8. Job v. 9. ix. 10. xxxiv. 24. Eccl. i. 15.

number *. When he threatens, *The Lord shall scatter you amongst the nations, and ye shall be left few in number*, it is again, only *men of number* †. And when Belshazzar is told, that *God hath numbered his kingdom* ‡, the meaning is, that its conclusion was near at hand. Yet we cannot say, that life is too short for us to enjoy the proper happiness of it. For in our present fallen condition, all things considered, we have much reason to be contented, nay, thankful, that the duration of man upon earth is no longer; and should have sufficient cause to be weary of it, if it were. For surely *threescore years and ten* is full space enough to be spectators of, and sharers in, the follies, the sins, the sufferings, of such a world as this. And both they who are *so strong, that they come to fourscore years*, experience a peculiar degree of *labour and sorrow* §; and that they, after *walking with God, are taken by him* ‖ ever so early, ought to be considered as *taken away* in mercy *from evil* ¶ of one kind or another. Nor is life too short for the business we have to do in it. For God requires, in this and all respects, only in proportion to what he gives. And we should every one of us easily do the whole that is needful here, would we but reflect what it is, and set about it in earnest: which they that will not, when the hours allotted them are so few, would be less likely still if they had more to trifle away. But there yet remains a sense, in which we all feel and own the shortness of life, when it is too late, if not before: that is, we find it waste much quicker than we imagined: not only because we seldom attain to live near so many years as we flatter ourselves; but because the utmost extent to which we can live, doth not allow such a multitude of

* Numb. ix. 20. † Deut. iv. 27. ‡ Dan. v. 26.
§ Ps. xc. 10. ‖ Gen. v. 24. ¶ Is. lvii. 1.

things to be done in it, as some fancy and imprudently attempt, nor afford room for such waste and negligence, or such a series of errors and wrong steps, as others adventure upon. And this being so evident and interesting a truth; the serious and frequent consideration of what it forbids, and what it calls for, must powerfully contribute to produce both a temper and a conduct of true wisdom.

But to this end we should place before our eyes two distinct views of our existence here: as it regards the present world, and as it is also a state of preparation for a future. At present I shall dwell chiefly on the former view: which, though it be a very confined and imperfect one, yet was of so great use to the good and virtuous under the Old Testament, when the world to come was less clearly revealed, that it ought not to be slighted now. And it visibly hath this advantage, that whatever is rightly inferred from it must be universally confessed: because, let men bring themselves to think ever so little, or doubt ever so much, concerning the next life, they cannot doubt but that which now is, will soon, and they know not how soon, come to its conclusion: from which truth alone, if they reflect on it duly, they will not fail to learn important lessons of moral, and even pious, (which will thus appear to be wise) behaviour. *As of the green leaves on a thick tree,* saith the son of Sirach, *some fall and some grow, so is the generation of flesh and blood: one cometh to an end, and another is born. Every work rotteth and consumeth away, and the worker thereof shall go withal. Blessed is the man that doth meditate good things in wisdom, and that reasoneth of holy things by his understanding* *.

* Ecclus. xiv. 18, 19, 20.

1. First then, as all virtues in general, both by their own proper influence, and the blessing of God, which reason leads us to expect, and Scripture expressly assures us of, conduce to prolong our days, the consideration of their natural brevity may well direct us to a virtuous conduct: particularly to sobriety, temperance, and chastity; to a prudent moderation of anger: and to whatever duties have especially the promise or the prospect of long life annexed to them. For nothing can be more absurd, than to contract into a yet narrower compass what is so far from needing it: unless it be, complaining against Providence, that human life is of so small continuance, when ours might be of so much greater, if we would: nay, when perhaps, at the very moment of our complaint, we are taking all the pains we can, not to live out one half of the few days that are appointed to man upon earth; and, in those we do live, to make ourselves miserable and fit for nothing; hastening old age before its season, and loading it with diseases, by an idle, luxurious and libertine youth.

2. Since we have but a small time to stay here, it is our wisdom to make it as easy and agreeable to ourselves and all with whom we have any intercourse, as we are able: and to imitate persons of prudence, who occasionally go journies together: bearing with each other's temper and behaviour, giving mutual comfort and assistance under the misfortunes and inconveniences of the way, and continually endeavouring to preserve or restore the good humour and cheerfulness of the company. By this method, we might live much more in a few years, that is, have a greater feeling of the blessings of life, than, by being reciprocally troublesome and vexatious, we can in ever so many. And surely it is very strange, that

having so scanty a share of being allotted us here, and this exposed by nature to such multitudes of unavoidable troubles and sufferings, we should contrive to pour additional bitterness into our common cup, by needless injuries and provocations. At best we have no happiness to spare: and therefore should rather study to increase our portion, by friendliness and kind offices, which will of course invite a return of them, than lessen it by selfishness, haughtiness, resentment, perverseness, unseasonable intermeddling; qualities, most of them uneasy in themselves, and all of them productive of numberless uneasinesses with every body around us. Or how little soever we may regard our own tranquillity, or how well soever we may hope to maintain it, in the midst of disputes and contentions: yet, as most persons are differently affected by such things, surely the condition of humanity in general ought to move compassion in us, and we should permit the little, which our poor fellow-creatures enjoy of good, to be enjoyed, while it lasts, in peace. We might image to ourselves, methinks, those who suffer by us, complaining and pleading, in language like that of Job: *Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee?—Seeing his days are determined—his bounds appointed, that he cannot pass; turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day* *. *Are not my days few? Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death* †.

* Job xiv. 1, 2, 3. 5, 6. † Job x. 20, 21.

3. The shortness of life should teach us to be speedy and diligent in doing all such things, as we ought to do. What these are, indeed, it doth not alone sufficiently show. But they are most of them so plain, and the rest so constantly taught us, that almost every one designs to practise them sooner or later, and become extremely good before he dies. But then they perpetually defer and postpone the time of beginning this reformation, on frivolous pretences; and never consider to any effect, how their life is passing away, and gliding from under them, in a course of actions, which they own is faulty, and will at last lament in vain. They think, they may throw away a great deal of it; and have plenty left, to act as they judge proper afterwards. Now were it to last ever so long, yet spending any part of it amiss, either wilfully or thoughtlessly, would be very unwise. But considering how short both others, and we ourselves, as far as our experience reaches, have always found it; to squander what with our best management is but enough, and what possibly may not hold out another day, is folly beyond expression. Therefore the son of Sirach, concerning one part of our duty, acts of kindness, advises thus: *Remember, that death will not be long in coming: and that the covenant of the grave is not showed unto thee. Do good unto thy friend before thou die, and according to thy ability stretch out thy hand, and give him* *. But long before that, Solomon had established the same rule, on the same foundation, concerning all other parts: *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest* †. If then we are guilty of any sin, or liable to any smaller

* Ecclus. xiv. 12, 13. † Eccl. ix. 10.

blemish, let us instantly amend, lest we should never have an opportunity: or at best should have a doubt, whether we forsook our faults, or they forsook us. If there be any valuable quality, that we want, and should reckon ourselves happy in the possession of; let us acquire it as soon as possible, and have the longest enjoyment of it, that we are able. Whatever we see would be right and fit for us to do, whatever we should be unwilling to go out of the world and leave undone, let us take the only way to make sure of doing, by doing it without delay. Every friendly care, every useful labour; every act, by which we can either provide properly for those who immediately belong to us, or benefit any other of our fellow-creatures, let us apply to it directly; and *work the works of him that sent us, while it is day: for the night cometh, when no man can work* *.

4. Another point of wisdom, which the shortness and precariousness of our present state of being should teach us, is to avoid long pursuits of worldly profits or pre-eminences; which probably either we shall not have time to attain, or must soon quit. Indeed, were the extent of man's life ever so great, it would be but a poor employment of it to fix our hearts on gaining more wealth, more power and influence, or higher rank, than would do us good; to neglect worthier attentions, and disquiet ourselves and our neighbours with these. But for a creature, whose days *fly away as a dream when one awaketh* †, to have an endless train of selfish designs, and schemes laid up for many years, when perhaps *this night his soul may be required of him* ‡, is monstrously unsuitable. And yet, I know not how it is, the nearer people are to their end, the more eager they commonly are to

* John ix. 4. † Job xx. 8. Ps. lxxiii. 20. ‡ Luke xii. 20.

get what they, of all the world, have the least occasion for, and the least excuse for being solicitous about; and instead of that ease and repose, which their time of day calls for, unnaturally force themselves to labour and fatigue of body and mind, when they can ill support either; till, in the midst of this preposterous vehemence and bustle, they are swept on a sudden into another state, with heads and hearts full of nothing but this. But though the absurdity of such immoderate attachments is most palpable, when persons are upon the verge of life; yet, in every part of it, the imprudence of forming distant expectations and designs, and having no reasonable prospect of their accomplishment, or at least of benefit from them, is both very real and too frequent. We have all a great deal to do in amending our ways, and rectifying our tempers, on which our happiness even here depends, and we scarce ever think of it: whereas we need but a very small share of temporal advantages to carry us on comfortably to our journey's end, and yet we set our minds almost wholly on increasing it; many by injustice, others by hard-hearted penuriousness, or sinfully anxious care; the former unmindful of the prophet's warning, *He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them,* perhaps *in the middle of his days:* and whenever he leaves them, *at his end shall be a fool**: the latter, equally regardless of the Psalmist's beautiful reflection: *Behold thou hast made my days as it were a span long, and mine age is even as nothing before thee: and verily every man living is altogether vanity. Man walketh in a vain show, and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them*†. Reasonable industry, to procure what is re-

* Jer xvii. 11. † Ps. xxxix. 5, 6.

quisite for us in our station, and for those with whom we are entrusted, far from being blamable, is a duty. But, when they who have no families, are as earnest in hoarding, as if they had ever so large ones, only to dispose of their wealth they hardly know or care to whom, and sometimes have not the heart to dispose of it at all: or when they who have families, make it their business to scrape together for them what will probably do them no real service, but only be a *temptation and a snare* * to them; when they grudge to relieve the necessitous and miserable, can think of nothing with pleasure, but accumulating still more, and are unable to say themselves, how much they would have: such a temper and behaviour is utterly unfit for so short-lived and frail a being as man. *Having therefore food and raiment,* that is, a competent provision of necessaries for ourselves and ours, *let us be therewith content: for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out* †.

5. A fifth use of numbering our days is, to check and compose all strong emotions of mind about worldly concerns: for in so transitory a state there can be nothing to deserve them. Why should we be elated with hope of future good, when both our own lives, and theirs on whom our expectations may depend, are subject to such innumerable chances; and the higher we raise ourselves in imagination, the more afflicting will be our fall? *Put not your trust,* saith the Psalmist, *in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth: in that very day his thoughts perish* ‡. *Cease ye from man,* saith the prophet, *whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of* §? Why again

* 1 Tim. vi. 9. † 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8. ‡ Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4. § Is. ii. 22.

should we be dejected with fear of future evils, when a thousand accidents, which none of us can guess at beforehand, may prevent their coming; or if they do come, our head may be laid low enough before that time, and far enough out of the way of feeling them; or even if they should light upon us, a short life hath no room in it for long sufferings? If we are visited with tormenting or wearisome diseases, the harder they press us, the more speedily for the most part they will work our deliverance, and bring us to that place, where *there shall be no sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain* *. If we lose our best friends, it was at most but a very few years that we could have enjoyed them. If we suffer vexations from our enemies, crosses in our affairs, all will soon be over, and we shall be securely situated, *where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary be at rest* †. If others obtain the honours, the profits, the gratifications, we wished for, there is little cause to envy them so perishable a distinction. If we obtain them ourselves, there is as little cause for exultation or pride while we have them, or indignation or surprise, when he, who gave for a time, takes away, or permits any one else to take away, what death is hourly hastening towards us to carry off irrecoverably. The various passions belonging to our nature were interwoven in it, to set us on pursuing good and avoiding evil, where it would prove to any purpose; for which end a moderate exercise of them serves best: and the spirit of contented resignation (of which there is plainly a principle in man, if he would but use it,) was appointed for our relief, and a great one we should find it, where we can relieve ourselves no other way. In so uncertain a state,

* Rev. xxi. 4. † Job iii. 17.

vehemence of temper is sure misery, and in *patience* alone can we *possess our souls* *. A quiet and meek submission therefore to whatever may happen, without indulging hope or fear, joy or sorrow, anger or dissatisfaction, is evidently the frame of mind, which our mortality requires. Or to express it in the words of St. Paul: *This I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth that they that weep be as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as though they used it not: for the fashion of this world passeth away* †.

It is true, calming our agitations by the prospect of death, may be thought by some to be curing a less evil by introducing a greater, which is left without cure. But indeed viewing it often and steadily will diminish its terrors, (which, unless we look beyond it, are chiefly imaginary,) as it doth those of every thing else in this world. Viewing it as the will of God, will oblige us in duty to submit to it contentedly, *remembering them that have been before us, and that come after: for this is the sentence of the Lord upon all flesh; and why are we against the pleasure of the Most High* ‡? Then viewing it also as a relief, though not of the most desirable kind, must contribute to reconcile many to it something farther, and on the whole pretty well. For though *bitter is the remembrance of death to a man that liveth at rest, and hath prosperity in all things, yet justly acceptable is it to the needy, and to him whose strength faileth, and that is vexed with all things* §. Yet still, it must be owned, this consolation is but a melancholy one. And therefore, God be thanked, though numbers of

* Luke xxi. 19.
† 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31.
‡ Ecclus. xli. 3, 4.
§ Ecclus. xli. 1, 2.

pious men in ancient days had probably no very clear knowledge of any other, yet he hath enabled us chiefly indeed by revelation, yet partly by reason itself, to see distinctly what they did not. And accordingly I must add,

Sixthly, and lastly, that the most important lesson, taught us by the shortness and uncertainty of our present life, considered in itself, is, that we may reasonably expect, and should therefore continually look forward to, another. The longest term at which we can arrive here, and the utmost use we can make of it, is so very a trifle and nothing, compared with the capacity for improvement, both intellectual and moral, which we experience ourselves to have; that, according to the most probable judgment we are capable of forming, there must be somewhat farther, and unspeakably better, designed and reserved for us by our wise and bountiful Creator: some other scene of existence opened, when this is closed, in which we shall grow up to our maturity; and manifest and rejoice in those perfections of our nature, which are hid and buried at present, in all to a great degree, in some almost entirely. That a being, qualified for so much, should have space allowed it for so little, would appear an evident impropriety and disproportion: which cannot be justly charged upon any part of the works of God. And the more we consider, what numbers are cut off prematurely in their tender youth, or just when their faculties are beginning to ripen; but especially, with what strange inequality, and unsuitableness to the behaviour of men, both prosperity and adversity are distributed amongst them by the confessedly unerring hand of Providence; the stronger the argument grows, that this cannot be all: that the view of life, which we have been taking

hitherto is a poor and narrow one indeed: that another of infinitely greater moment is to follow it, in which every thing wanting here shall be supplied, and every thing wrong set right. But, convincing and interesting as these deductions of reason are, nothing is able to *bring life and immortality into* full *light*, much less to assure impenitent sinners of everlasting punishment, and penitent believers of eternal rewards, but the Gospel of *Jesus Christ* *. This therefore must be always the principal object of our attention: and this, through God's grace, to be obtained by its means, will teach us, what else we cannot learn effectually and practically, to think of this our mortal state, as a short and precious opportunity given us to prepare for another and an endless one; the happiness or misery of which is to depend on the affections cultivated, and the deeds done by us, while in the body. Were the life which we now live, imagined to be the whole, multitudes would argue, plausibly though unjustly, that it could be no great matter, how they spent it; whether they acted virtuously or viciously, discreetly or indiscreetly: since *one event happeneth to all; and the wise man dieth as the fool* †. But our share in the recompenses of that, which is to come, cannot possibly be regarded as a slight thing. If then we are to be blessed or wretched for ever, accordingly as we behave well or ill in the meanwhile, this makes our conduct a serious point beyond expression; and draws most affecting consequences after it; such as the weakest person must see, and the most artful can raise no objection against: that the pleasures and profits of sin are never to allure us, nor the difficulties and affections of virtue to deter us in the least, but both in com-

* 2 Tim. i. 10. † Eccl. ii. 14. 16.

parison to be looked on, as if they were not: that the enjoyments of the present state are to be used with cautious moderation, and the burthens of it to be borne with cheerful hope: in short, that we are to *walk by faith, not by sight* *: applying indeed to worldly business, as far as our stations require; and partaking of worldly comforts, as far as will excite our thankfulness to God for them, and answer the purposes intended by them; yet still setting our affections principally, not on the attainment of transitory accommodations or amusements, during our journey; but on securing, by a diligent performance of the work, for which we were sent upon it, a joyful entrance into our *continuing city* †: which God of his infinite mercy grant us, through, &c.

* 2 Cor. v. 7. † Heb. xiii. 14.

SERMON VII.

PSALM XC. 12.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

From these words I have proposed to treat of the wisdom, the instruction in piety and virtue, which may be learned from the shortness and uncertain duration of human life; considered,

I. With respect to the present scene of things only:

II. To that eternal one, which is to follow.

Even the former of these views, though extremely and essentially imperfect, yet affords, as I have shewn you, many important lessons and directions: that by sobriety, temperance, chastity, and due government of all our passions, we should endeavour to prolong the space allotted us here; that we should use every proper method of making it as easy and comfortable to one another as we can; that we should be diligent to improve our little time to the best purposes, and do quickly what we would not leave undone; that we should proportion our desires of riches and honours and power, and every worldly good, to the scanty term which we have for the acquisition and enjoyment of them; that we should moderate our emotions of joy and grief, of hope and fear and anger; vehemence in any of them being plainly unsuitable to a condition so transitory; and lastly, that

from the low attainments of our earthly state, and the short continuance and unequal distribution of its blessings, we should be raised to the belief and earnest expectations of a better.

Very different conclusions, I am sensible, and very bad ones, have been often drawn from the small number of our days: of which, besides many instances in the looser heathen writers, we have so distinct and beautiful an account in the second chapter of the Book of Wisdom, that I shall repeat it, and make some remarks on it, before I go further.

The ungodly said, reasoning with themselves, but not aright, Our life is short and tedious: and in the death of man there is no remedy, neither was there any man known to have returned from the grave. For we are born at all adventures, and we shall be hereafter, as though we had never been—our time is a very shadow, that passeth away: and after our end there is no returning. Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present; and speedily use the creatures like as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of the spring pass by us: let us crown ourselves with rose-buds, before they be withered. Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness: let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place: for this is our portion, and our lot is this. Let us oppress the poor righteous man: let us not spare the widow, nor reverence the ancient grey hairs of the aged. Let our strength be the law of justice: for that which is feeble, is found to be nothing worth *.

Now it is certainly to be expected, that if this life were to be our all, we should each make the best advantage of it, that we could. But then the way to do so is a very different one from that, which *the*

* Wisd. ii. 1—12.

ungodly, reasoning with themselves, but not aright, propose. Thoughtless gaiety and dissolute pleasures, how inviting soever the description of them may sound, bring persons daily, and often with surprising suddenness, into distresses and sufferings of various kinds; which, destroying their reputations, their fortunes, their healths, will give them much more cause to complain of the shortness and yet tediousness of life, than they had when they first attempted to palliate this evil by such fatal remedies. For vice and folly have the unhappy secret of reconciling this seeming contradiction, by lessening the extent of our days, and at the same time increasing the burthen of them.

But supposing that such miseries could be avoided, human nature is not fitted for a perpetual hurry of amusements and extravagances; nor, without a very painful force upon itself, can bear them: but all excesses of this kind are severely punished, sooner or later, by that lowness and dejection, which fails not to follow wrong indulgences; and yet more severely by that moral principle which is deeply rooted in our hearts, that voice within, which will have its turn to be heard, as indeed it ought to be heard always. They therefore are the happy persons, not that can spend the most hours in forgetfulness of themselves, in idle and unwise and perhaps criminal gratifications; but who can delight to be their own companions; can enjoy the calmer and stiller, but much more inward and real pleasure, of a serene and composed mind, of a worthy and benevolent and thankfully pious heart; who are able to look back without shame, and forwards without fear. These are the satisfactions of a reasonable being; which as they, who have once fully experienced them, have always

declared to be the highest possible; so they, who have not, should, in all fairness and common discretion, make due trial of them before they reject them. And upon such trial they would find that man is not a creature formed to dissipate himself in trifling levity, much less to wallow in debauchery and brutishness; but hath the seeds of somewhat noble and divine planted in his breast; which his great concern is to cultivate, improve, and exert. They would learn a higher valuation of themselves, and feel how justly the son of Sirach hath directed: *Glorify thy soul in meekness, and give it honour according to the dignity thereof**.

As to the second inference, drawn by the ungodly, which patronises oppression and cruelty: there is something so hateful and shocking in these enormities; so contrary to the tenderness which is natural to our hearts, till we wickedly harden them; so inconsistent with the welfare and very being of society, that no one guilty of such practices can at all expect, either to be easy in himself, or safe from others. And therefore, though the interests of this life alone were to be considered, no argument could be rationally urged from the shortness of it, in favour of any thing so entirely opposite to the evident design of Him who placed us here for our good, as both voluptuousness and injustice are.

But whatever conclusions men may think they can draw from this first and imperfect view: yet, when our life on earth is contemplated in the second that was proposed, as a state of preparation for another, and an endless one; then neither the wit, nor almost the folly of man, can make any other than virtuous inferences from the shortness of it. And to the want

* Ecclus. x. 28.

of looking upon it in this light the Book of Wisdom ascribes principally those profligate reasonings, which I have been confuting. *Such things did they imagine, and were deceived; for their own wickedness blinded them: as for the mysteries of God, they knew them not; neither hoped they for the wages of righteousness, nor discerned a reward for blameless souls* *. Without this knowledge it was weak to argue as they did; but with this knowledge it had been impossible; so important are the alterations, which it makes in our case. Indeed it supplies us, in a very great measure, with three of the chief things, which we want in our pilgrimage through the world. These are,

1. Conviction of the necessity of applying diligently to know and do our duty.
2. Encouragement to persist in it to the end against temptation.
3. Support under the afflictions, to which we are exposed in the meanwhile.

Now serious and frequent reflection, how soon the present state will terminate in one of infinitely more consequence, is adapted to be of the utmost service to us, in each of these respects, through that blessing, which God is ready to bestow on our sincere endeavours used, and prayers offered up, in the name of Christ: *for without Him we can do nothing* †.

I. To keep alive in us a strong conviction of the necessity of applying diligently to know and do our duty.

Were this life the whole of our existence, there would be many, thoughtless enough to imagine, that being so short, there could be no mighty difference, in what manner it was spent, right or wrong: for so

* Wisd. ii. 21, 22. † John xv. 5.

small a journey, any way of undertaking it would serve; and fancy be guide sufficient; the advantages of choosing well could not be exceeding great; the inconveniences of choosing ill would soon be over, indeed whenever one pleased; and the end of all things would quickly come, when prudence and imprudence would be just upon a level. But plausible as this may look, when it gratifies the prevailing humour; surely whoever conceives the present state to be his whole portion, be it as short as it will, ought to think it deserves his whole attention: else he may not only miss all the happiness, that he can promise himself, but find there is room enough for such a one, as he is, to be more than a little miserable as long as he lives: notwithstanding which, he will probably wish to continue in being as long as he can.

Yet still if the supposition on which these men venture their all were true; the harm which they would suffer by conducting themselves absurdly, would not be so extremely pitiable; and they might contrive to make it appear much less than it is. For affectation and obstinacy can support some, for a time at least, in bearing a great deal, and calling it a trifle. But whatever trifles the pleasures and the pains of this life may be; the felicity reserved for good persons in another, and the punishment to be inflicted (and which our consciences tell us will be justly inflicted), on such as have perverted and abused their own natures, injured their fellow-creatures, disobeyed the commands and defeated the purposes of their Creator; these things must be of moment unspeakable: and which of them shall be our lot, absolutely depends on the use we make of the space allowed us here. How greatly doth it con-

cern us then, carefully and frequently to examine what share we have *wrought* of *the works of Him that sent us;* and to recollect how soon *the night* may and must *come, in which no man can work**.

To know the former, we must search, through the wide extent of the divine law, into our performances and our deficiencies: whether we have uniformly expressed towards our Maker, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, that reverence and love, that resignation and thankfulness, that hatred of sin, and universality of obedience, which their authority over us, and goodness to us, so strongly require: whether, on all occasions in common life, we have been so just and upright, so mild and forgiving, so charitable and bountiful, so friendly and compassionate, so faithful and attentive to the various duties of our several stations and relations, as we know we ought; whether lastly in the government of ourselves we have been so observant of purity and decency, so temperate and abstinent, so indifferent about things below compared with those above, as becomes beings designed to sustain the character of rational, moral, religious, Christian. If we have not (and most certainly we have not), can we truly say, that we have repented, and thrown ourselves on God's mercy in Jesus Christ, and are still in a penitent and believing state? Unless this be so, the one thing needful is hitherto undone: and even if it be done, yet how much employment is there still upon our hands, to perfect our humiliation for what is past, and undo, as far as we can, all the evil, that we have ever done, and perhaps have been doing for a long time, against our fellow-creatures, as well as in the sight of God! Not only our external behaviour, but the inward

* John ix. 4.

principles of it, must be continually reformed; all our bad inclinations first be detected, which is no easy task, then gradually subdued, which is a very hard one: especially when we have suffered them by indulgence to strengthen their original hold on our hearts. They cannot be extirpated in this life: they will frequently rebel; and yet must be always overcome. But this is not the whole. Further still, every Christian virtue, every qualification prescribed in the word of God, must be planted in our souls, tenderly cherished, and incessantly carried on towards maturity. For it is only *if these things be in us and abound,* that *an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour* *. How little we have of some of them, how much too little of all, we cannot be totally ignorant. But we shall never know, as we ought, and yet less be able to supply, our defects, unless we are both enlightened and strengthened by the grace of God. Have we then prayed and laboured for this, and have we obtained it, and are we making a proper use of it? Without it our hope of amendment is vain: and even with it, so much is wanting to be done, that we have by no means any time to throw away.

For, alas! what is the time of man upon earth? The whole of it is short: a great part of it necessarily filled up with things not related, or very remotely, to our main business: perhaps, if not certainly, much the greatest part already past, and irrecoverably gone: so past, it may be, as to increase both our work, and the difficulties of it in the remainder. That remainder also will fly as speedily, and, unless we take care, as unprofitably too, as what preceded. And

* 2 Pet. i. 8. 11.

how small a remnant it may prove to those who have seemingly the best reasons for making themselves large promises, we can never know amidst the perpetual accidents, that cut off such great numbers in the prime of their days; and are many of them too sudden to leave room, even for that miserable comfort, a death-bed repentance.

It appears very harsh, and is extremely painful, to give people, in a dangerous sickness, the slightest intimation how little this remedy is likely to avail them. And therefore they ought to be the more frequently and strongly reminded of it, whilst they may hear it with less terror, and greater benefit. A presumptuous or thoughtless mortal lives negligently and sinfully year after year, in hopes of repenting of his sins, when he comes to the end of his days: that is doth a multitude of ill actions, in hopes that hereafter he shall heartily wish he had never done them. Can this be? Are such persons in earnest? No; but they are trying, if possible, to cheat God and themselves at the same time; to disobey his will so artfully as to avoid punishment, and obtain reward. Now what imaginable prospect is there, that, from a heart so deliberately false, any true repentance will ever come? Besides, what certainty is there, that any one will have time allowed him, or that his understanding will not fail, or that he will not grow hardened instead of penitent; or indeed, that he shall have spirits and attention sufficient in the midst of pain and sickness and languor, to recollect his numerous transgressions, and to apply earnestly for pardon? If he hath, undoubtedly it is the best and only thing that he can do for himself: and omitting it is making a very bad case greatly worse. But still, to be grieved for our sins only when we can live no

longer in them, and are afraid of being immediately condemned for them, is a very suspicious kind of sorrow: and moreover, it is not to mere sorrow, that God hath promised forgiveness, nor to mere faith; but to such only, as will produce amendment, for which, in these circumstances, there is little or no room. Nor can either bye-standers, or the dying man himself, know in the least, whether it would produce any, were a longer life to be granted: or whether he would not relapse as thousands of others, notwithstanding the most promising appearances, have done, into his former wickedness. And therefore no one can, on sure grounds, either administer comfort to others, or take it to himself, in such a case: how dreadful soever it will be to have none in that hour, when we shall want it most.

Since therefore our preparation must be made before our end comes; which will come soon, and may come when we think of it least; how vigilant should we be not to spend any of our time in sin; and how unwilling to spend more than is necessary in trifles! how studious to make our common employments in life consistent with and subservient to our *heavenly calling* * ! how careful to be always in readiness, to have *our loins girded and our lights burning, like men that wait for their Lord* † ; *lest, coming suddenly, he find us sleeping* ‡ ! How frequently should we imagine ourselves in the condition, in which we must be shortly; when the pleasures, the profits, the preeminences, that we have pursued so eagerly, will vanish into nothing; when the duties that we have slighted so boldly, will appear the most important of all things; and the only firm support will be, *that in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we*

* Heb. iii. 1. † Luke xii. 35, 36. ‡ Mark xiii. 36.

had our conversation in the world * ! Why should we not think now as we certainly shall then? Why should we not act now, as we shall wish from the bottom of our hearts we had done; and wish in vain hereafter for what at present is undoubtedly feasible, and but moderately difficult?

Such reflections as these, may be disagreeable to us: but they will become very supportable. God, in great mercy, hath framed us so, that the consideration of mortality, however awful, is not too strong for us. We can look upon it without overpowering our faculties; and turn our thoughts from it with ease to the daily business and even amusements of life. But it would be a most unworthy and pernicious return, because he doth not force it upon our minds constantly, which would unfit us for this world, therefore to lay it out of them entirely; or so near it as to neglect providing for the next. And the more averse any one is from meditating on these things, the more needful it is for him. Not thinking of death, will ward it off never the longer; but only make it infinitely terrible, when it comes: and thinking of it effectually will bring it never the sooner; but only dispose us to wait for it in peace, and receive it with calm resignation, if not with joy. *O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end* † !

2. The shortness of this life, when we view it as an introduction to another, besides proving in the strongest manner the necessity of diligence in our duty, gives also the greatest encouragement to persevere in it, against all difficulties and temptations.

Indeed the pains that we take, to lay aside our faults and cultivate our virtues, will seldom fail to

* 2 Cor. i. 12. † Deut. xxxii. 29.

reward themselves plentifully even here, by *the peaceable fruits of righteousness* *. But were it commonly otherwise, were the yoke of our Master heavy and his burthen grievous; it is not long that we have to bear it. The warfare against our spiritual enemies, the sorrow of being too often unsuccessful in it, the watchfulness over our bad inclinations, the painfulness of self-denial, the ridicule and censure of *a world* that *lieth in wickedness* †, all this will soon be past, and we shall *receive the end of our faith* and obedience, *the salvation of our souls* ‡. If the other life were very distant, and *the crown of glory* § not to be given us, till we had been some hundreds of years, like the ancient patriarchs, *fighting the good fight* ||, and *enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ* ¶, it were less wonder, if *any should grow weary, and faint in their minds* **. But since the days of our trial are thus few, and eternal felicity is annexed to so short a struggle; we may cheerfully *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and provoke one another to love and good works; and so much the more* continually, *as we see the day approaching* ††. *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh* ‡‡.

And as the nearness of another state lessens very considerably the difficulties of virtue; so doth it also the advantages of sin: which indeed are seldom real, even here, but much the contrary, were all duly considered, whatever bad men imagine, *whom their*

* Heb. xii. 11. † 1 John v. 19. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 9.
§ 1 Pet. v. 4. || 2 Tim. iv. 7. ¶ 2 Tim. ii. 3.
** Heb. xii. 3. †† Heb. x. 23—25. ‡‡ James v. 7, 8.

own wickedness blinds *, as they well deserve it should. But supposing them ever so often in the right, the utmost benefit they can receive is but for the present life, it may be, for a small part of it: and all that we can possibly get or lose, enjoy, or suffer in this world, bears no proportion to that which is to come. Indeed, whatever must have an end can bear no proportion to that which hath none. And consequently, were we to live ever so long, provided we were to die at all, there could be no reasonable comparison between our interest in the present life and the future. But when the present not only ought in reason to be looked on as nothing, but shews itself to our very senses to be as nothing; when we can so easily reckon up the few years it is composed of, *the bounds appointed, which it cannot pass* †: even then to let ourselves be cheated with it, and the poor false promises it makes us; and for these to quit the hopes of an immortality, just ready to be conferred on us, the blessedness of which exceeds our imagination, and will be continually increasing for ever; this is what nothing, but the melancholy experience of it, could make one believe was possible. But so the fact stands. Men give up eternity in exchange for a moment: here they will have their portion, whatsoever shall come after. And though they must know, would they think at all, that *the judgment* of the wicked *lingereth not, and their damnation doth not slumber* ‡; yet either they fly from the conviction, or they harden themselves against it; and desperately resolve, that nothing, but what is present, shall make any impression upon them: whereas in just reckoning every thing present should be regarded almost only as it promotes or obstructs our prepara-

* Wisd. xi. 21. † Job xiv. 5. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 3.

tion for futurity. Faithfulness to our duty should be our whole concern: and what we may suffer here by doing it, or gain here by transgressing it, should be accounted very insignificant; as we certainly shall account it, if once we obtain from God the skill of *numbering our days* aright.

3. The last use, which I shall mention, of considering how soon this life will terminate in another, is, that we should support ourselves with the prospect of being happy shortly under all that may afflict us in the meanwhile.

Indeed, were there to be no future state, the misfortunes of the present would be much the more tolerable for ending so soon. But still, losing the comforts of it would be the losing our all; and going through it in misery would embitter our whole existence. Now were the space of it more or less, yet being the whole, we could have nothing to make us amends for our disappointments and sufferings, or to exalt us above them. Death indeed would free us, earlier or later; and so far be a remedy: but a very gloomy one, were all to end there: such a one as most people would think worse than the disease, and be *through fear of* it *all their life-time subject to bondage* *. But now, as the interests of this world are only a small part of our concern, they deserve only a small part of our consideration: and as the conclusion of the present scene is immediately followed by a second, which shall never conclude, it furnishes out to us a triumph over its own terrors. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory* †?

Bad persons indeed can derive no comfort from hence: for the end of their worldly sorrows is the beginning of infinitely more dreadful ones. But if

* Heb. ii. 15. † 1 Cor. xv. 55.

we are sincerely pious and virtuous, the crosses and troubles under which we may labour here, the parting with our friends, the provocations of our enemies, poverty and contempt, sickness and pain, the wearisomeness of old age, the feebleness of decaying nature, whatever can be grievous to us, will not only soon be succeeded by happiness, but will increase that happiness unspeakably, provided we only bear it with a dutiful patience for this little interval. *Now therefore, why disquietest thou thyself, seeing thou art but a corruptible man? and why art thou moved, whereas thou art but mortal? and why hast thou not considered the thing that is to come, rather than that which is present* * ?

We cannot indeed, through the original weakness of our depraved faculties, be so much cheered by these considerations as we have cause; and we should not despair upon it: but we may be cheered by them much more, than we are; and we should endeavour it to the utmost; assuring ourselves, that in our future state, we shall smile at recollecting the heaviest calamities of this, with much more contempt than we always do, in our maturer years, at remembering the petty afflictions of our childhood.

Let us resolve then, that we will try to *take* even *joyfully* not only the losses of this world, *knowing that we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance* †; but also the *dissolution of this tabernacle*, since *when we are unclothed we shall be clothed upon with an house eternal, and mortality be swallowed up of life* ‡. Let us under all pressures, of whatever kind, *look up, and lift up our heads: for our redemp-*

* 2 Esdr. vii. 15, 16. † Heb. x. 34. ‡ Cor. v. 1—4.

tion draweth nigh * : and contentedly *wait all the days of our appointed time, till our change come* † ; never *casting away that confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry* ‡. These reflections let us familiarize to ourselves; and learn from them to fix our hearts, not on such unworthy objects, as we are subject to be disappointed about every moment, whilst we have them; and must at farthest in a few years undergo the final disappointment of parting with them for ever; but extend our ambition to nobler views; and since we are made for eternity, become superior both to the pleasures and the griefs of time, that being neither seduced by the one, nor dejected by the other, we may go on with a steady and cheerful attention to our present duty, and our approaching bliss; till the *few and evil days of our pilgrimage* § being ended, we may have our consummation in peace; and be admitted everlasting inhabitants of that *city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* ‖.

* Luke xxi. 28. † Job xiv. 14. ‡ Heb. x. 35. 37.
§ Gen. xlvii. 9. ‖ Heb. xi. 10.

SERMON VIII.

JOHN XV. 26.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.

THE blessings, which we have received from the sovereign Lord of all, are either the original ones of creation and providence, or the superadded one of redemption from sin and misery. The former sort are in some measure discoverable by reason, but much more fully made known by revelation: of the latter our whole knowledge is from revelation alone. But being through its means once acquainted with those new relations, in which God's mercy to fallen man hath placed us, and with the new obligations, to which they subject us: it is no less criminal to disregard this part of religion, than the other: since not only the foundation of it in the truth of things is equally real, but its importance to our happiness, if possible, greater. And the several Persons of the sacred Trinity having manifested their love to us by concurring in our recovery, and conducting and executing, according to the disposition of Infinite Wisdom, their several shares of that gracious work; we are consequently bound to distinct acts of faith and duty towards each: the performance of which, agreeably to the direction of God's word, constitutes the

peculiar duty of a Christian. Amongst these, the present season leads us to consider, what offices the Holy Ghost hath condescended to execute for our salvation. And as they consist, partly in testifying to us outwardly the certainty of our religion, partly in moving us inwardly to be affected by it as we ought, I shall discourse now on the former of these points: by laying before you,

I. More generally, the testimony given by the blessed Spirit, in successive ages, to divine truths; above all to the grant of a Saviour to mankind.

II. In a more particular manner, that ever-memorable confirmation, vouchsafed us on this day, to the doctrine of the Gospel, by his descending on the Apostles, and enduing them with miraculous gifts: of which I shall prove the reality, and draw from it proper inferences. For it will be useful to put *you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth* *.

I. First then, I shall lay before you, more generally and briefly, the testimony given by the Spirit, in successive ages, to divine truths.

Prophecy, as St. Peter observes, *came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost* †. Accordingly we find in multitudes of places, from the earliest book of Scripture to the latest, supernatural impulses and illuminations ascribed to the Spirit of God ‡: nor can we doubt therefore, but they proceeded from him always, though sometimes it is not expressly affirmed. So that we are to honour the third Person as the im-

* 2 Pet. i. 12. † 2 Pet. i. 21.

‡ Gen. vi. 3. xli. 38. Numb. xi. 25, 26. xxiv. 2. 1 Sam. x. 10. 2 Kings ii. 9. &c. 1 Chr. xii. 18. 2 Chr. xv. 1. Neh. ix. 30. Ezek. ii. 2. Zech. vii. 12. Rev. i. 10. ii. 7. iv. 2, &c.

mediate inward instructor of men from the foundation of the world: as him who hath admonished, reproved and striven with the wicked; who hath warmed and cheered the hearts of the pious in all times, with manifestations of God's will, with declarations of his favour, with precautions against unseen dangers, with promises of deliverance from the heaviest afflictions, with his presence and guidance in the most intricate difficulties. But as the principal demonstration of the goodness of Heaven was the purpose of sending our blessed Lord into the world, this most important dispensation it was the peculiar care of the Holy Spirit to notify: giving first such darker and less explicit intimations of it, as however sufficiently answered the necessities of mankind; then gradually unfolding and opening the several particulars of the scheme; so as that every generation might be blessed with some new accession of light and comfort beyond the former; and that, by duly-proportioned intervals, *the day might dawn, the day-star arise* *, then at length *the Sun of Righteousness* † shine forth: at which time all the variety of types and prophecies, and all the intricate steps of Providence through all ages, should plainly appear to point out and centre in this one great event, and undeniably show, that *known unto the Lord are all his works from the beginning* ‡.

Now therefore *the fulness of time being come* §, and the circumstances of things fitly disposed, the next operation of the Spirit of God for our redemption was the supernatural conception of the promised Saviour ‖: on whom he afterwards descended like a dove at his baptism ¶; led him into the wilderness to triumph

* 2 Pet. i. 19. † Mal. iv. 2. ‡ Acts xv. 18.
§ Gal. iv. 4. ‖ Matt. i. 18. ¶ Matt. iii. 16.

over the tempter*: and so conducted the man Jesus through his whole state of humiliation, that all he said and did is represented in Scripture as proceeding from this influence: and those mighty works of his, which bore witness of him, are to be considered as repeated testimonies of the Spirit on his behalf. Thus he himself hath taught us, laying claim to the words of Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me: for he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind*†. And again, *if I by the Spirit of God do cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you*‡. And in like manner St. Peter: *That word, which was published through all Judea, ye know; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him*§. But, besides the miracles, which he performed before his death, the New Testament, according to the common, and I think true interpretation, ascribes also to the same divine agent that great miracle and foundation of our faith, his rising again; where he is said by St. Paul to have been *declared the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*‖; and by St. Peter, to have been *put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*¶.

Thus then it appears in general, that from the earliest times *the Spirit of prophecy was the testimony of Jesus***: and bore witness to his Gospel by continual

* Matt. iv. 1. † Is. lxi. 1. Luke iv. 18.
‡ Matt. xii. 28. § Acts x. 37, 38. ‖ Rom. i. 4.
¶ 1 Pet. iii. 18. ** Rev. xix. 10.

signs and wonders, during his abode on earth. I now proceed,

II. To that particular confirmation of it, by the descent of the Holy Ghost on his Apostles, which he foretells, in the text and elsewhere, should follow his leaving the world; and which produced effects so greatly superior to all preceding attestations, that the Holy Ghost is said in Scripture not to have been given, or, as other copies read it, not to have been, before*: meaning comparatively; and in respect, not of his existence, but his operations on believers.

Now these were reserved, for several good reasons, till after our Saviour's ascension. It was prophesied of him, that *when he ascended up on high he should lead captivity captive,* subject to himself multitudes who had been slaves to the wicked one; and, as the means of doing this, should *receive gifts for, and give them unto men*†: which prediction St. Paul expressly quotes‡, and St. Peter surely alludes to it, when he saith: *Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear*§. It was a proper beginning of the exercise of that authority, with which he had been so lately invested: and a new and most seasonable proof of it, especially to his poor disciples, who must extremely have wanted comfort under the loss of his personal presence. Now no comfort could be so reviving, as to find the tokens of his power even increased by his absence; and themselves enlightened with greater knowledge of truth, and strengthened with more ability of performing mighty deeds, than when *he went in and out amongst them*‖. Besides, now they

* John vii. 39. Comp. Acts xix. 2. † Ps. lxviii. 11.
‡ Eph. iv. 8. § Acts ii. 33. ‖ Acts i. 21.

were to go immediately on their unparalleled enterprise, the conversion of mankind: and therefore now, and not before, it was time they should be furnished with the miraculous qualifications, requisite for that purpose.

Accordingly, *when the day of Pentecost*, the tenth after the ascension, *was fully come;* a festival, at which Jews and proselytes of all countries and languages resorted to Jerusalem, besides that large numbers of them usually dwelt there; the Apostles *were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind; and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance* *. There were, it seems, a few inconsiderate creatures, as the sort is too common, who found matter of ridicule in this, and *mocking said, These men are full of new wine* †. But the very imagination, that twelve serious men should, every one of them, be so unaccountably overtaken, at so unlikely an hour too as nine in the morning, was incredible and absurd; as St. Peter well observed ‡: whose speech, made instantly on the occasion, in the *words of truth and soberness* §, if ever any was, would alone abundantly have confuted the charge, even though he had not named it. And yet a farther confutation was, (and there could not be a stronger) that the foreigners present must know, whether the languages they heard were real ones; and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea must some of them know, whether

* Acts ii. 1—4.
† Acts ii. 13.
‡ Acts ii. 15.
§ Acts xxvi. 25.

they, who spoke them, had ever learnt them: and the result was, not that they were detected, but that *three thousand souls were added to them the same day* *, and the number increased continually †.

In this chapter of the Acts indeed there is mention only of the single gift of tongues: as being the most remarkable in itself, and most immediately exercised. But from the whole of their history it appears, that the Apostles were entrusted, and doubtless at the same time, with various other supernatural endowments: as their Lord had promised them, that they should do the same, and even *greater works* than he, *because he went unto his Father* ‡. And besides the powers, of which many inferior disciples partook with them, there was one peculiar to them: that, by prayer and imposition of hands, they were able to communicate the gifts of speaking with tongues, and performing miracles, to whom they thought proper. Once indeed, in the extraordinary and new case of Cornelius, *the Holy Ghost fell*, without human interposition, *on all which heard the word preached* §, as he had done at first on the Apostles: that the whole world might be fully convinced of what the Jews were very backward to believe, that *to the Gentiles also God had granted repentance unto life* ‖, since he had *given his Spirit to them, even as he did unto others, putting no difference between them* ¶. And thus did the Comforter testify, not only the truth of Christianity in general, but our title, who are descended from heathens, to a share in the blessings of it: without which testimony perhaps we had *sat to this day in darkness and the shadow of death* **. But still, ordi-

* Acts ii. 41. † Acts ii. 47. ‡ John xiv. 12.
§ Acts x. 44. ‖ Acts xi. 18. ¶ Acts xv. 8, 9.
** Luke i. 79.

narily speaking, that the superior dignity of the Apostles might be preserved, and by its means the unity of the church, and the purity of the faith; these miraculous gifts were conveyed only through their hands, to such persons as, by illumination from above, they saw to be qualified for them.

Thus then, to speak in the terms of St. Paul, *to one* man *was given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another the gifts of healing, to another the working of* other *miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these wrought that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he willed**. And now, imagine a church of Christians under the conduct of some of our Lord's immediate disciples, and exhibiting to the world around them such gifts as these. Represent to yourselves, first, a number of plain unlearned men, delivering a doctrine, perfectly worthy of God, and suited to the nature and condition of mankind; evidently and vastly more so, than all the discoveries of unassisted reason, in all ages, put together, had been able to furnish; professing themselves to have received and been charged to spread it through the earth, by a person of a character absolutely faultless; whose birth and actions, and every thing material that befel him, had been gradually foretelling ever since the creation, and all came to pass accordingly: whom in farther confirmation of his authority, they had seen, for years, performing daily miracles of the highest power, and the tenderest goodness; whom they had seen supporting the reality of his mission by calmly delivering himself

* 1 Cor. xii. 8—11.

up, and suffering death on the cross; whom yet afterwards they frequently beheld alive and conversed with, till at length while they stood by him, a cloud received him into heaven: supposing them all to persist unanimously in this account, without any possible interest to serve by it, and with the hourly danger of being detected, if what they said was false; to have continually before their eyes, and one after another to undergo, at considerable distances of time, with the utmost cheerfulness, every thing that can be dreadful to human creatures, merely for asserting these facts, and behaving suitably to them: such a testimony to such a religion, must surely without any additional proof, appear thoroughly convincing to every honest and reasonable mind. But lest, after all, it should be thought possible, that these witnesses might either, by some strange means, be all deceived in every one of the above-mentioned evidences; or all agree (though one sees not why they should, or how with any success they could), to deceive others in them: let it be farther supposed, that from being ignorant and slow of understanding, as they notoriously were, they now of a sudden *speak with a wisdom and a spirit,* which their adversaries *are not able to resist* *; that from being exceedingly timorous mortals, they are likewise of a sudden, when there is more ground for fear than ever, become totally void of fear, and rejoice to suffer in defence of their cause: that being well known neither to have enjoyed opportunities of learning in their own country, nor yet to have travelled out of it; well known to have had, a few weeks before, no other dialect, than their native rustic idiom of Galilee; (which they had not skill enough to disguise,

* Acts vi. 10.

when they would have wished it most, but were betrayed by their speech, and found out for what they were); that these, quickly after, are qualified to discourse fluently and properly with men of all the different nations of the world, and that *each hears them speak, in their own tongues, the wonderful works of God**: that, farther still, they can foretell things future, discern the very secrets of men's hearts, heal diseases, raise the dead, inflict miraculous punishments on their opposers; in a word, can work all the wonders, which they affirm their Master to have wrought; and, which is more, enable others, altogether strangers to them, immediately on their believing, to work the same: what can there be wanting to satisfy every examiner completely; and whence can these things proceed, but from the power of the divine Spirit?

Now such were the proofs on which the first Christians assert they received their religion: and their very reception of it, notwithstanding such prejudices of education against it, and threatening discouragements from it, is the strongest presumption, that the arguments urged to them were convincing, and their belief undeniably true. It is an acknowledged fact, that Christianity spread in a very few years through every nation then known, and that multitudes of every rank embraced it. Now by what possible means could a faith, so entirely opposite to the established superstitions of all countries, and the favourite vices of all the inhabitants of them, be thus propagated, in a knowing and inquisitive age, by a handful of men, without learning and without power, against all the learning and power of the world, vigorously and without delay

* Acts ii. 8. 11.

applied to withstand it, but by such testimonies of the divine Spirit in its favour, as the first Christians unanimously say attended its progress? These afford a clear explication of this wonderful change: and fair enquiry will show, that nothing else can. It is easy to pick out little cavils, nay indeed to raise very plausible objections here and there, against the evidence of any thing. It is easier still to get a few general phrases, of enthusiasm and bigotry and imposture and credulity, and throw them about at random. But let any unbeliever take only the undoubted facts, relating to Christianity in its first rise, and try to solve them upon his principles, entering into particulars; and he will find it impracticable, not only to give any account attested by history, how they did happen (though that he ought to do), but even any guess or imaginary supposition how they could happen, if our religion be false, that will not be full of infinitely greater difficulties and incredibilities, than he can pretend to allege against the truth of it. And therefore either the Gospel prevailed by these miracles, for which we contend, or its prevailing without them was the most amazing miracle of all.

But besides this way of reasoning, to prove, that there must have been such griefs, we have direct historical evidence, that there actually were such.

Indeed what you have already heard concerning them, from the Acts of the Apostles, carries with it very sufficient authority. For that book was the work of an author, who lived at the time, and had means of being well acquainted with what he relates, and could have no temptation to write falsehoods; and was allowed, by those who must know, to have written truth. But the argument from St.

Paul's epistles appears to be somewhat stronger yet: and the strength of it lies in this narrow compass; that they were certainly written by him; and immediately received, and highly esteemed, by the several churches to whom they are directed: that in them he mentions frequently the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, as then subsisting in those churches; that he would not have dared to do this, had there been no such thing; or if he had, he and his letters could never have been respected, as they certainly were.

For the first point, that these epistles are really his, we have the strongest external evidence imaginable: the testimony of some of his contemporaries, of many who lived immediately after him, and the universal consent of mankind. But the internal marks and characters of their being genuine, are, if possible, yet more convincing to a judge of such matters. There is an evident air and look of truth and preciseness preserved throughout them. The numbers of persons on various occasions named in them; the minute directions and orders that are sent; the obscurity of several passages, occasioned by their referring to questions asked and accounts of things given by the churches, and to their present situation, in one respect or another, are manifest tokens that they are what they profess to be. A writer of counterfeit pieces would either be too artful to venture into such particulars, or must have failed in some of them. But then the reception of them by the congregations, to which they are inscribed, completes the impossibility of a fraud. Suppose an imposter to draw up letters of a considerable length to such and such societies, churches for instance, relating to many of their members and acquaintance, and to many things, of many sorts, done,

believed, or debated amongst them, and not to make in any one of these a single mistake, which is quite inconceivable: yet, when these performances came into the hands of these persons, pretending in the title to have been sent to them or their fathers, not many years before, can it be imagined, they will all agree to receive them as such, though till then they had neither original, nor copy, nor memory, nor tradition of them? A false history may creep silently into the world, and obtain credit by degrees. A false collection of letters may impose on strangers, remote in place or time: but that the very men, or body of men, to whom they declare themselves to have been written a little while ago, and who absolutely know nothing of their ever being written to them at all, should believe in them, is utterly inconceivable: and still more so, if these letters affirm such extraordinary things to be then doing amongst them, as could not have been forgotten, if they had been done, and yet are not remembered. Now it never was, or can be denied, that St. Paul's epistles were admitted as his, and honoured as sacred, were continually read and quoted both in private and public, by those churches, of which they bear the names, not some ages after his death, for then there might have been colour for a charge of imposition, but from his own days downwards. Nay, if we allow the testimony of early and venerable writers, his originals themselves were preserved there (a thing by no means unlikely) to following generations.

Now in these epistles, thus proved authentic, the miraculous operations of the Holy Ghost appear to have been common amongst Christians. The workers of miracles, they who spoke with tongues, who prophesied, who had the gift of healing, are men-

tioned there as familiarly as the Apostles, elders and teachers. Nay farther, as the exercise of some of these powers in the church, it seems, was irregular sometimes, and made confusion, there are many directions laid down by the Apostle for the regulation of it. And farther still, because the persons endued with them were too apt to value themselves, and be valued by others, immoderately on account of them, he insists very much, in the true spirit of Christianity, on the preferableness of *charity*, that is, of love to God and man, before *speaking with the tongues of men and angels*, before *prophecy*, before the *faith that could remove mountains* *. Is it possible now that all this should be written to, and received and respected by persons, who had no such gifts amongst them? Is it possible also, that St. Paul, when, as we find in these very letters, he had rivals and enemies in these churches, men of interest and influence, of art and subtlety, should, in the face of them all, appeal, as he doth, to miracles performed by himself and others, for a proof of his authority and doctrine, before their eyes, if in reality neither he, nor any one else, had ever performed any? Observe, how he expostulates with the Galatians, on the danger of their apostatizing from the Gospel to the law. *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit*, the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, *by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? He that ministereth the Spirit to you and worketh miracles among you, doth he it by the works of the law, or the hearing of faith* †? Again, he boldly pleads to the Judaizing Roman converts, those things *which Christ had*

* 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. † Gal. iii. 1, 2. 5.

wrought by him to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God *. And when, amongst the Corinthians, his apostleship had been questioned by some, his answer is, *Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in wonders and mighty deeds* †: and from the consciousness which he had of the assistance of the Spirit, he threatens to *come to them* again *shortly, and know, not the speech of them, which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God*, he adds, *is not in word, but in power* ‡: agreeably to what he had told them in a preceding chapter; that *his* own *preaching had not been with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit of power, that their faith might stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God* §. Now as it must be, not only imprudence, but madness in him, to speak of these things, if they were not true; so his speaking of them could not but have produced the entire rejection of his epistles and himself, if the several churches had not known them to be true. And therefore, since these churches did continue to reverence him and them as of more than human authority, it follows, that these operations and miracles were both real and frequent amongst all Christians in general. For even when he was congratulating the illustrious church of Corinth on her gifts, he doth not hint to her (many and great as we know they were) that she was before, but only *not behind others* in that respect ‖.

And now what remains is, that being satisfied of the certainty of these things, we lay seriously to heart the proper inferences from them; which are indeed

* Rom. xv. 18, 19. † 2 Cor. xii. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. iv. 19, 20.
§ 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. ‖ 1 Cor. i. 7.

too many to be enlarged on at present, but happily too plain to need it. In general it follows, that the religion, which we profess, is no other than the truth of God: the doctrines of it, however mysterious, reasonable objects of firm belief; the precepts, however difficult, matter of indispensable duty; its glorious rewards, secure to every good person; its dreadful punishments, unavoidable by every bad one. More particularly in regard to that Spirit, which testifies these things, it follows, that we should honour him, as possessed of those divine attributes, which they imply, and which the Scripture ascribes to him repeatedly; that we should make our thankful acknowledgments for these his outward manifestations, and pray for his inward and saving influences on our souls; that we should receive the Gospel more submissively, and obey it more diligently, for his having ratified and confirmed it in so unparalleled a manner; often recollecting for this purpose that awful admonition: *if the word spoken by angels*, the law of Moses, *was stedfast, and every transgression received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost** ? To whom, with the Father and the Son, &c.

* Heb. ii. 2. 34.

SERMON IX.

JOHN XIV. 15, 16, 17.

If ye love me, keep my commandments.
And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever:
Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

OUR blessed Lord might very possibly design to comprehend in this promise all the benefits, which the Holy Ghost was to confer on his followers. But his expressions plainly shew, that he had chiefly in view, not the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, but the directing and comforting influences of his grace. For these alone are given to all, who *love Christ and keep his commandments:* these alone were to *abide with Christians for ever:* these alone *the world could not receive,* because they would not suffer themselves to *see* or *know them:* and though, in appearance, a less illustrious, they are, in reality, a more important gift, than those of tongues and miracles. Bor though the latter were powerful means of making religion believed, the former only can bring it to be practised; and therefore it is highly necessary to teach and inculcate the doctrine of in-

ward grace: that men may earnestly pray for it, faithfully use it, and heartily rejoice in it. Some, indeed, have abused the persuasion of *God's working in them* to a neglect of *working out their own salvation* *. Some have mistaken the feelings of an enthusiastic warmth for testimonies of the divine Spirit; some have done extravagant, and others wicked actions, under pretence of his direction. But as their ascribing too much, can never warrant our ascribing too little to his influence on our hearts; and error is best confuted, not by maintaining the opposite error, but by setting forth the truth: I shall therefore endeavour,

I. To shew the credibility of this influence from reason:

II. To give a more certain and full account of it from Scripture:

III. To reconcile it with experience: And

IV. To make suitable inferences from the whole.

I. To shew its credibility from reason; which, however needless, if men regarded Scripture as they ought, may be useful in disposing them to regard it more than they do.

A little inspection into ourselves will convince us, what imperfect creatures we are; and how poorly qualified for the practice of piety and virtue. We have indeed, by nature, a general knowledge of our duty, and very just motives to it, with some dispositions in its favour. But then, on the other hand, we have much inattention to religious truths, and great prejudices against them: we have many bad inclinations to mislead us: we have an indolence that lets them easily prevail over us: we are in a world, full of ill examples and vicious maxims of life; of enticements to unlawful pleasures, provocations to immo-

* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

derate resentment, temptations to ambition, envy, covetousness, every sin. And sometimes a number of these enemies are combined together so strongly, and attack us so unprepared, that a much greater force, than the ordinary powers of the human mind, would be very unlikely to stand against them. And when once they overcome us, every fall makes way for another; the sensibility of conscience decays, good affections are stifled, wrong passions inflamed, wrong customs formed; and reason, habituated to be overpowered, yields at length without struggle. Now what is there to be expected, for the future, from men, unassisted in these circumstances? It does not follow, indeed, that they will always go on uniformly to destruction, without some intervals of better purposes and endeavours. From time to time their eyes shall be opened, their fears alarmed, excellent resolutions made, and, for a while, persevered in most zealously. But too soon this fervour cools, our vigilance abates, a thousand things happen to put us off our guard; and one thing alone, trusting in our own seeming strength, is sufficient to lull us into a security that will prove fatal. Sinful inclinations and habits always retain a stronger party within us, than appears; and when we least think of it, snatch a favourable opportunity and recover their empire, perhaps more absolutely than before. After some experience of this kind, men come indeed to have less confidence in themselves. But what is the usual consequence? Why, that not looking beyond themselves, at the very time of forming good purposes, they scarce hope to keep them; and so their efforts grow daily more heartless and faint, till at last they become quite weary of the fruitless trouble; and it may be, instead of trying any longer to be good,

labour to persuade themselves, that they neither need nor can be so.

This is plainly (ask your hearts if it be not) the common course of things: the daily event of the combat, between mere human virtue, and the trials, which this world throws in its way. Yet all the while it is an evident truth, that the very end of our being is, the practising of these duties, which we find so difficult; and the rooting out of these sins to which we feel ourselves so prone. Now what God hath made us for, he must some way have provided we should be able to do, in such measure as he will accept. He most clearly sees the dangers to which we are exposed, and the poor degree of strength and preparation, with which we meet them. The never-ceasing influences of his providence preserve and actuate every part of the material world. And can we imagine that he, who is always taking care of all his other works, down to the very meanest things on this earth, will disregard the most important thing in it, the eternal interests of the souls of men? It would be injuring his goodness, his holiness, to think so.

It is true, beings endued with free will and choice, as we are, must not be acted on so as to destroy it, but suitably to their nature. And how many such methods may there be within the reach of infinite wisdom and power? He who hath given us all the inward principles we have, cannot he, at pleasure, repair their decays, restrain their vehemence, rectify their disorders? He, who hath established the ways by which his creatures communicate their minds one to another, must not he be able to communicate himself to them, when he judges it proper; to represent the beauty of goodness, the deformity of sin; to suggest proper motives of duty and interest; to

urn their attention from dangerous objects; to inspire them with religious and virtuous affections; to bring into their minds just and wise rules of conduct; and all this at such times, as shall be most needful for our reformation, our safety, our improvement? These invisible operations of God on our minds, are plainly no more inconsistent with our liberty, than the secret or open persuasions of our fellow-mortals are. And therefore it is perfectly credible, that as we, who have so little goodness, are prompted by it however to advise and assist each other, He, who is absolutely good, will not refuse his gracious help, in such cases as really want it; and especially to such persons, as humbly desire it, and honestly make use of it: for careless and presumptuous sinners have by no means the same ground to hope for aid from a just and holy God. But to what degree he will either strengthen the former, or admonish the latter, is entirely beyond human knowledge: only this we know, that he may do what he will with his own; and will do always what he sees to be wisest and best.

Nor is the persuasion of God's enlightening and assisting men to perform their duty, a notion started in these later ages of the world; but, from early times the best and most considerate, even of the heathens, have held and taught this doctrine: and all men every where implicitly own it, by offering up prayers to heaven for direction, how they should act for help and success in their attempts: of which prayers the faith of a divine interposition is the only possible ground. These things, put together, must surely, at least, prepare us to receive more readily, and with more entire confidence in it, that fuller light, of which I now proceed,—

II. To give some account from Scripture. There we are taught that human nature is corrupt and degenerate, and no longer able to stand alone against the temptations which itself breeds; and yet less when they are strengthened by the suggestions of wicked men, and of *our adversary the devil, who as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour* *: that therefore our Maker, who still requires obedience from his creatures, and yet doth not require impossibilities, hath from the beginning *striven with* the bad †, and *instructed* ‡ and *established* § the good, by *his Spirit within them* ‖; though it were more abundantly poured forth, when the Gospel was published: from which we learn, that *except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven* ¶: that by *the spirit of adoption* **, changing our nature and condition, we are entitled, *through faith in Christ,* to call God our Father; and that *if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto our children; much more shall our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him* ††. Now in this declaration our blessed Redeemer evidently means, not giving his miraculous powers (which few in proportion ever had, and perhaps none ever presumed to request for themselves), but his saving graces; which, to use the preceding words, *every one that seeketh, findeth;* and which answer in the spiritual life, to bread in the natural. Accordingly St. Paul in the conclusion of his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, prays, that *the fellowship,* or *communion,* the communication of the blessings *of the Holy Ghost, may be with them all,* as well as *the grace of our Lord*

* 1 Pet. v. 8. † Gen. vi. 3. ‡ Neh. ix. 20.
§ Psalm li. 12. ‖ Gen. xli. 38. ¶ John iii. 5.
** Rom. viii. 15. †† Luke xi. 13.

Jesus Christ, and the love of God. Certainly th i means, not a benefit peculiar to a few in the primitive days, but an influence from the blessed Spirit on the soul, of which every true believer in every age might partake.

Thus then the Holy Ghost is given to all Christians. And, as we are taught in the same Scriptures more particularly, he *opens our understandings* * *and hearts* †, that we may discern our lost condition, by sin original and actual; may attend to the offers of the Gospel, and *know the things that are freely given us of God* ‡. He also inclines our souls not only to embrace, but *obey the truth* §. Such as comply with his motions, he *leads* ‖ uniformly on to their maturity in goodness, to the *measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* ¶. Those who deviate from the right way, he brings back **; by representing, partly the terrors of religion, partly the mercies; *renews them in the spirit of their minds* ††, and forms them again to the image of God. In this manner he conducts the whole flock of Christ; *helps their infirmities* in their devotions, *making intercession within them* ‡‡; enables them to *profit* by the ordinances appointed for them §§; *teaches them* all *things*, which they need to know ‖‖; in every affliction and temptation makes *his grace sufficient for them* ¶¶. Proportionably as they use these advantages well, *he fills them with the fruits of the Spirit*, which are *in all goodness and righteousness and truth* ***: and thus *is* present *with them*, and *dwells in them* continually more and more, so that they *grow up*, to use the Apostle's expressions,

* Luke xxiv. 45. † Acts xvi. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 12.
§ 1 Pet. i. 2. 22. ‖ Rom. viii. 14. Gal. v. 18.
¶ Eph. iv. 13. ** Ps. cxix. 176. †† Eph. iv. 23.
‡‡ Rom. viii. 26. §§ 1 Cor. xii. 7. ‖‖ John ii. 20. 27.
¶¶ 2 Cor. xii. 9. *** Eph. v. 9. Phil. i. 11.

into temples of the Holy Ghost, habitations of God through the Spirit *.

Not that all good Christians have an equal sense, or equal share, of this happiness. For though they must feel, with some degree of comfort, the good dispositions which the Holy Ghost hath wrought in them; yet fears and doubts concerning their spiritual state may, at times especially, prevail: and the best persons, through mistaken opinion, or constitutional lowness of spirits, think too ill of themselves; as the worst people often think too well, and have lively perceptions of groundless confidence. It is not therefore by our inward enjoyments, but our obedience, that we are to judge of our condition. However, generally speaking, in those of confirmed goodness, *the Spirit bears witness* powerfully *with their spirit*, makes the testimony of their conscience clear and strong, *that they are the children of God* †. And hence arises that *joy in the Holy Ghost* ‡ the Comforter, which is a foretaste of heavenly happiness: that assurance of God's favour, which is called, in Scripture, being *sealed with the spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance* §.

And now, having seen what reason and Scripture teach in this matter, it will be time to enquire,

III. Whether sad experience doth not contradict both. For it will be said, Who is there, that feels any other principle moving within him, than the natural workings of his own mind? And it must be owned, that the generality of men, at least, have no such perception of any secret impulses upon them, as can make it certain, that the Spirit of God is the author of them, any otherwise than as we know, that

* 1 Cor. vi. 19. Eph. ii. 21, 22.
† Rom. viii. 16.
‡ Rom. xiv. 17.
§ Eph. i. 13, 14.

every good gift is from above *. Yet sometimes a religious or virtuous thought shall present itself to us so very suddenly and seasonably, that we cannot but have a more particular persuasion, if we reflect at all, of its proceeding immediately from a gracious invisible Power. But were this otherwise: we every day see persons influenced by their fellow-creatures, and strongly too, without perceiving it in the least. And is not our Creator infinitely abler to do the same thing? Our Saviour argues very justly: *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit* †. The very motion of the air is much too subtle to have its course and the manner of its operations minutely traced; yet its effects are very manifest, and very great. Thus likewise the Spirit of God, though it be invisible, is yet powerful in its movements, producing such changes in the heart, as nothing else can.

But it may be urged, that "even of these effects there is by no means the evidence, which might be expected. Many persons are as bad, as they well can be: and few, if any, so good, as they easily might be: where then is the proof of those heavenly influences, which are to reform the one sort and perfect the other?" Now we should remember, that throughout the dispensations of God towards rational creatures, he in no case doth so much as he can: for doing less is more properly suited to their make. As we have not by nature a sufficient power, he is ready to add to it. But as we have by nature some power, of taking preliminary, though of themselves ineffectual, steps towards amendment, he requires we should first exert that: and ordinarily will

* James i. 17. † John iii. 8.

make our behaviour the measure of his own: though sometimes *that he may shew the exceeding riches of his grace* *, he extends uncommon degrees of it to very great sinners. Our Saviour therefore, when in the text he promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples, doth it only on the condition, that, with the strength which they already had, they *kept his commandments:* and tells them that the rest of *the world cannot receive this Comforter, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him;* they turn their eyes from the light, and harden themselves against feeling conviction. Yet even such he treats, by his Spirit, for some time, in the manner, which himself describes: *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him* †. But if men *resist the Holy Ghost* ‡, *grieve him* §, and *do despite to him* ||; no wonder, if at last he depart, and leave them to the sin and misery, which they have chosen. *For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter; nor dwell in the body, that is subject unto sin. The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit; and remove from thoughts, that are without understanding: and will not abide, when unrighteousness cometh in* **.

They then, who are resolute in wickedness, can hope for no experience of our Saviour's promise: and for the same reason, such as are irresolute in goodness, can expect but little. For the rule so often repeated in the Gospel, is, notwithstanding its first appearance, very reasonable: *unto him that hath, shall be given; and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, even that he hath shall be taken from him* ††: to all, who receive and use the grace of God, it shall be continually increased; and from

* Eph. ii. 7. † Rev. iii. 20. ‡ Acts vii. 51.
§ Eph. iv. 30. || Heb. x. 29. ** Wisd. i. 4, 5.
†† Matth. xiii. 12. xxv. 29. Mark iv. 25. Luke viii. 18. xix. 26.

all, who repel and reject it, gradually withdrawn. If therefore persons, in some measure well-meaning, too often feel, and consequently believe, scarce any thing of the good fruits of the Spirit; the reason is plain: either they neglect themselves, in one part or another of their conduct; or they trust to themselves, and neglect God: of both which errors he will convince them. But if, by joining earnest prayer with diligent watchfulness, *we draw nigh unto him, he will* soon *draw nigh unto us* *, and *pour out his Spirit upon us* †. Indeed the very different effects, that we shall find, both in ourselves and others, from acting in confidence of mere human strength, and relying on the power of the divine grace, is proof sufficient from experience, that the cause, which produces that difference, is a most real and most efficacious one. Let us therefore now proceed,

IV. To the inferences from, and uses of, this doctrine; which are, that we be thankful for so great a blessing, and careful to improve by it.

1. That we be thankful. Indeed the natural powers, which we have, are all of them the gracious gifts of a good God. But when these were so weakened and perverted, as they are by the fall of Adam and our own transgressions, then to provide for supplying their defects and rectifying their disorders, by daily offers of such light and strength, as we daily want, instead of leaving us to ourselves, as we deserved; this is more abundant grace: and makes our situation in some respects better, than that, from whence our first parents fell. Consciousness of great strength is very apt to lead all persons, as probably it led them, into unforeseen dangers:

* James iv. 8. † Prov. i. 23.

which the more we despise, the more easily they overcome us. At least, it seldom fails to give us an esteem of and confidence in ourselves, very unsuitable to the condition of a creature. Even in our present state, we are strangely inclined to think too highly of our good qualities; and to forget, that *whatever we have, we have received* *. How much more then should we do it, if our native poverty were not so evident in itself, and so clearly taught in God's word!

But farther: the doctrine of grace is as powerful a guard against despair, as against pride. Had our natural abilities been much greater than they are, and fully sufficient to resist every ordinary temptation: yet had these been our whole ground of hope; when any trial of uncommon difficulty befel us, they could not have increased in proportion to it, but must have sunk under it. Whereas now we are sure, that as our danger is, so shall our strength be: that *God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape* †. Most gladly therefore, with St. Paul, may we *glory in our infirmities*, since *his grace is sufficient for us*, and his *strength is made perfect in our weakness* ‡: and most cheerfully may we set ourselves to *work out our own salvation; since it is he that works in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure* §. Let us often consider then, what thankfulness it deserves, that God's holy Spirit is thus active for our benefit: and at the same time let us always remember, by whom this blessing is procured for us: *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter.* The in-

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.
† 1 Cor. x. 13.
‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9.
§ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

tercession of our blessed Lord, founded on his sacrifice of himself to divine justice in our stead, that is the channel, through which grace is derived from the fountain of all good; and a lively faith in him is the only way of opening our hearts to receive the salutary streams of it. But then, as *faith without works is dead* *, we must be sure, carefully to improve this invaluable gift. It was an ancient and useful precept of philosophy, that men should learn to reverence themselves, and their own consciences. If this were not sufficient to keep wrong inclinations in awe; it was farther directed, that they should imagine they were acting in the presence of some venerable person, whom they would be ashamed to have seen their wickedness and their folly. Such as had perfecter notions of things, went yet further; and taught men, that in all, which they thought and did, they were under the eye of an infinitely just and holy Being, the Maker, Lord and Judge of all. It may seem, that this consideration is the very weightiest, that possibly can be. And yet it will strike us with an additional awe, if we reflect moreover, that in committing sin, we act not only against his known will before his face, but against his counsel and command at that very time given us: that he is not only a witness of the good thoughts and suggestions that we reject, but himself the author of them: that when our hearts tell us we are doing ill; it is not their voice merely, but that of the Almighty speaking to us inwardly, that we disregard. Seldom do we fail in any great instance of our duty, but something within at the instant reproaches us with doing wrong. Were this nothing but our own judgment, we should be highly blamable for contradicting it. But what conviction

* James ii. 20.

must we feel, when we know it is indeed the Spirit of God; and reflect, how often, how wilfully, how contemptuously, we have disobeyed such a monitor! The Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts them: *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares* *. Much stronger is the argument, why we should admit and embrace every pious and virtuous impulse and suggestion: for this is receiving into our souls a greater than angels, the Holy Ghost himself. Let us therefore humbly invite this divine guest to dwell with us, and ever open our hearts to his heavenly inspirations: which, as they will never prompt us to any thing, but what reason or Scripture plainly dictates; and, by that one mark, are easily distinguished from every false pretence to the Spirit; so they will effectually enable us, and they alone can, to persevere in our duty against all temptations; they will fill us with comfort under all afflictions; daily improve us in *all virtue and godliness of living*, and make us at length completely *meet for the blessed inheritance of the saints in light* †.

* Heb. xiii. 2. † Col. i. 12.

SERMON X.

GAL. V. 22, 23.

But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

THESE words, even at the first reading of them, present to us a very engaging description of the good effects of the Spirit of God on the hearts of Christians: and consequently set before us a subject extremely proper for our attention at this time; when we celebrate the effusion, not only of his miraculous gifts, but of his saving graces: the former of which were no more than the means of spreading the Gospel; the latter, one of the great ends attained by it: the one, temporary; the other, perpetual.

And to apprehend the design of St. Paul in this passage more completely, it will be requisite to bear in our minds his principal intention throughout the Epistle: which was to prove, that believers in Christ were not bound to observe the law of Moses; nor allowed, if they did observe it, to consider that as the ground of their acceptence with God. These indeed are points, concerning which we at present are fully satisfied: and therefore may possibly wonder at his taking so much pains to clear them up. But men were then very generally, and somewhat naturally, inclined to the contrary doctrine: that law being

confessedly of divine institution; and our Saviour and his apostles, and all the first converts to Christianity, having kept it with great regard. Consider also, that on the question, whether it was to be kept still, the practice, not only of that, but of every succeeding age, greatly depended. For even we of this must have borne the yoke of all the Jewish ceremonies, and retained all the statutes of the Jewish commonwealth, had it been at first decided, that they continued obligatory. Nay, in a yet more important respect must the temper and spirit of our religion have been different from what it is; had we either expected to be justified by the works of our own righteousness in fulfilling God's law, as most of the Jews did; which must have nourished within us a Pharisaical pride, instead of Christian humility: or had we been convinced, as we easily might, that *our best works cannot endure the severity of God's judgment* *; and yet had been left to look for eternal life from precepts, which we obeyed so imperfectly, that they could only condemn us, instead of resting our hopes on Him alone, who came to save us. You will easily infer that our mistake would be equally fatal, were we now to trust solely to our Christian good deeds, as if we had trusted in the Jewish. It was therefore with great reason, and great benefit to the faithful of all times, that St. Paul dwelt so much on these points, in so many of his Epistles, as he did. For in most he hath inculcated them more or less; though in none so earnestly throughout, as in that before us.

But then, as the law of Moses consisted not only of religious ceremonies, and rules of civil government, but moral duties likewise; and all these had been

* Art. xii.

observed together on the same footing: to convince men, that the two former were designed to subsist no longer, and yet preserve a due regard to the last, was an affair of the utmost difficulty, but notwithstanding of absolute necessity. And therefore as soon as ever he had asserted to the Galatians *the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free*, and exhorted them, in the beginning of this chapter, to *stand fast in it;* he quickly proceeds to confine it, ver. 13, within its proper bounds, by subjoining, *only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh:* that is, to any wicked purpose. For our propensities to sin are frequently expressed in Scripture by the word *flesh*, because they arise from our present fallen state in this mortal body: as, on the contrary, our dispositions to good are distinguished by the name *spirit*, because they proceed from the Spirit of God; and perhaps in part also, because they are approved by the spirit or reason of our own minds. Thus he opposes them in two verses after: *walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.*

But such general terms, though very useful on account of their comprehensiveness, are liable to be misapplied, or passed over with too little attention. And therefore, that no one might be ignorant of his own state, since every thing is best known by what it doth and produces, he lays before them a catalogue first, of *works of the flesh*, then, in the text, of *fruits of the spirit:* for he will not honour with the latter name *the unfruitful works of darkness* *. The former, he saith, *are manifest:* it being easy for persons themselves, and all about them, to see if they are grossly wicked. But whether indeed we are truly good, is a matter much less obvious; but of too great conse-

* Eph. v. 11.

quence, both to our direction and our comfort, not to be examined with the most accurate care.

For this purpose then I shall at present endeavour,

I. To explain, as far as is necessary, the nature of the several virtues, mentioned in the text:

II. To shew in what sense, and how far, they are the *fruits of the spirit*:

III. To lay before you the meaning and importance of that expression, that *against such there is no law*.

I. To explain the nature of the several virtues mentioned in the text: where probably the Apostle did not intend to make out a complete list of Christian graces; but to specify those only, on which it was most necessary to fix the minds of the persons, to whom he wrote. The rest would be understood by parity of reason, or further instruction, if they were not already: and had they been all crowded together, the multiplicity would have distracted their thoughts too much.

Now the duties, of which mankind in general want to be reminded the oftenest, and of which the Galatians particularly wanted to be reminded then, were those of kind and charitable dispositions and behaviour one towards another. They were engaged in a warm dispute upon the question, which I began with mentioning. Each side would be in danger, as is always the case, of using the opposite ill: the Judaizing, which was the major part, of treating the advocates for liberty, as profane enemies to the law of Moses; these, of treating them in return, as tyrants, and imposers of a yoke unnecessary and hurtful. But Christianity requires meekness towards all men; especially to such as do wrong through error of judgment, be it ever so greatly. And there-

fore St. Paul, after charging as many, as were persuaded of their liberty, so to stand fast in it, as not to abuse it, points out in the very next words, that abuse, against which it was most needful to guard: *But by love serve one another.*

Suitably to this, the same virtue stands first in the catalogue, with which the text presents us: where it might indeed comprehend love to God, *the first and great commandment* *; but, by what precedes and follows, appears rather to signify love to our fellow-creatures. Now this duty needs but little explanation. We all know it consists in good-will to every one, to be shewn, so far as we have opportunity, by every method which is consistent with other obligations; and in good opinion and esteem of every one, so far as they give us a just ground for it; which virtues would so effectually direct us right in the whole of our mutual behaviour, that the Apostle hath, with very good reason, assured us, but a few verses before, that *all the law*, meaning all which relates to social conduct, *is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* †.

However, placing the same object in various lights gives a fuller view of each part of it: this therefore he proceeds to do. And the first view, in which he represents *love*, is expressed by the word *joy*. Now if the former be understood to comprehend love to God; the latter will very naturally signify (as it elsewhere doth,) taking pleasure in the persuasion of his present and future favour. But if the one be confined to our fellow creatures, the other must also: and then it will mean, delighting in their good, spiritual and temporal; suitably to the character, given in another Epistle, of *charity*, the same word with

* Matt. xxii. 38. † Gal. v. 14.

love in the original, that it *rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth* * ; and to that description of *the kingdom of God*, as ruling in the heart, which a third Epistle exhibits to us, that it consists in *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost* † ; that is, in the communications, which he hath made of his gifts and graces, to others as well as to ourselves: the very opposite temper to those *envyings*, that are enumerated, just before the text, amongst *the works of the flesh*.

The word *peace*, also, which follows next, may signify peace with God, and consequently within our own breasts: but is determined by the others on each side, rather to signify, principally if not solely, a peaceable temper and conduct towards all around us. *Long-suffering* too, sometimes means patience under afflictions: but here, more especially under provocations and injuries. *Gentleness, goodness* and *meekness*, are virtues, which men, how little soever they practise them, understand very well, and therefore need not have explained to them.

Faith indeed is a more ambiguous term. Most commonly it denotes a persuasion, speculative or practical, of divine truths: the latter of which is the foundation, both of our obedience to God, and of our acceptance with him. But sometimes it relates to what passes among men in society: and thus it signifies faithfulness; or such a principle, as we may securely have faith in, and dependance upon: which it may very well signify here; for nothing is of greater importance in human affairs. And yet, as the Apostle seems intent on recounting the good-natured, rather than the merely useful virtues, faith, or belief, may mean in the text, if ever it doth any

* 1 Cor. xiii. 6. † Rom. xiv. 17.

where else, due readiness to be persuaded of what makes in favour of persons; as we are told of charity, in that description of it, which I just now mentioned, that it *believeth all things, hopeth all things.*

The only remaining virtue is *temperance*, or self-command. For the original word is by no means so confined, as that, by which we translate it, is in common use: but extends to the governing, and preserving within its proper bounds, every movement of our hearts, not only towards pleasure, but wealth, honours, resentment, any thing indeed, which can either entice or provoke us to act injuriously. Now in this general sense it most fitly concludes and completes the list. For, whatever good inclinations we may have, we shall fail greatly of being such as we ought in the community of mankind, if we indulge any mischievous ones along with them. And those, which are called the gay vices, produce as great, perhaps greater and acuter misery in the world, than downright malice: nay, the irregularites, by which men are said to hurt no one, but themselves, always hurt many besides. Or could these things be otherwise, which they cannot: the design of religion is to prevent all hurt, to ourselves, as well as others: to make us happy, as well as harmless; happy in the next life, as well as the present. And we shall never be either, but by the practice of those virtues, which the Apostle here tells us, are *the fruits of the spirit.* I shall now proceed,

II. To shew you in what sense, and how far, they are such.

As, in several places of the New Testament, the word *flesh*, denotes the law of Moses, a great part of which *stood only in carnal ordinances* *; so *the spirit*

* Heb. ix. 10.

likewise often denotes the purer and sublimer dispensation of the Gospel *: which is also said, more than once, to *yield* or *bring forth fruit* †; and undoubtedly the same fruit with that in the text. But, in this chapter, the word *flesh*, hath plainly, as I have observed to you, a very bad sense: and cannot possibly signify the law; nor *the works of the flesh*, the works of the law: nor consequently can *the spirit*, which is the opposite term, signify here the doctrines or precepts of Christianity. Some therefore, understanding rightly by *the flesh* a sinful disposition, have understood by *the spirit*, merely a Christian one; and by the *fruits of the spirit*, the effects of that disposition. But indeed the good qualities, which you have heard explained, are the several parts, not the effects, of a Christian temper: and to call them the fruit which it bears, when they are indeed the ingredients of which it is composed, would surely be an improper manner of speaking. Others again, by *the spirit* understand only the rational principle within us. And by that name indeed the Scripture often calls it. But then the Scripture never ascribes Christian virtues and graces to human reason alone, as the productive cause of them. So that, after all, the common interpretation is much the best. The spirit meant is the Spirit of God; our bad qualities are from ourselves; our good ones from above. Our Saviour hath told us, that *as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can we, except we abide in him* ‡. And as our union to him, and *entrance into the kingdom of God*, or Gospel state, is first made by being *born of water and of the the Spirit* §; elsewhere called *the washing of regene-*

* Gal. iii. 3.
† Mark iv. 8. Col. i. 6.
‡ John xv. 4.
§ John iii. 5.

ration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost *: so it is, *through the* same *Spirit, dwelling in us,* that we must ever after *mortify the deeds of the body* †, and *be strengthened with might in the inner man* ‡. Every Christian virtue therefore proceeds from the *fellowship* or *communion of the Holy Ghost* § ; the communication and partaking of his influences. For *if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his* ‖. And as we ought to pray for *the Holy Spirit,* which *our heavenly Father will give to them that ask him* ¶. we must also be duly thankful for the gift; and ascribe the good actions, that we are able to do, not to ourselves, *but to the grace of God which is with us* **. *We are not sufficient to think any thing, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God* ††.

We have indeed originally more or less of right disposition, either remaining in us notwithstanding the fall, or restored to mankind after it, which prompts us to many imperfect instances of right behaviour; whence the Apostle speaks of *the Gentiles,* as *doing by nature the things contained in the law* ‡‡. But then we must remember, first, that this and all our powers are the gift of God; and secondly, that the best of our natural powers do not enable us to fulfil duly the law of Christ, without the inward motions of the Holy Spirit: as on the other hand, his motions may prove ineffectual too, if we *resist* §§ or *quench* ‖‖ them; if we neglect to *work out our own salvation* with the strength which he gives us, instead of being encouraged to it, as we certainly ought, by his *working in us both to will and to do* ¶¶.

* Tit. iii. 5.
† Rom. viii. 13.
‡ Eph. iii. 16.
§ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.
‖ Rom. viii. 9.
¶ Luke xi. 13.
** 1 Cor. xv. 10.
†† 2 Cor. iii. 5.
‡‡ Rom. iii. 14.
§§ Acts vii. 51.
‖‖ 1 Thess. x. 19.
¶¶ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

Our own endeavours then being still necessary; and, if used in humble dependence on God, certain of success; there can be no objection from reason against this doctrine. Nor is it any real one from experience, that we have seldom, if at all, an immediate and distinct perception of these influences. For our fellow-creatures influence us often very strongly, without our perceiving it: much more then may the Almighty. And that the operations of his power in the works of grace should be secret and silent, and commonly gradual, is by no means improbable, since they are so in the works of nature. This gives occasion in each for the thoughtless to forget God; but for the considerate to admire him the more: who by a slow and imperceptible progress, for the most part, brings to perfection *the fruits of the spirit*, as he doth those of the earth; and the former, if due cultivation be not wanting, with infallible success; *filling the heart* of the Christian always, as well as of the husbandman usually, *with food and gladness* *. How very great cause for gladness a sense of being *filled with* these *fruits of righteousness* affords men, will appear from proceeding,

III. To lay before you the meaning and importance of that expression in the text, that *against such there is no law.*

Of these words it is a very true sense, that the practisers of the Gospel virtues have generally speaking nothing to fear from human laws: and a very material sense, considering what severe punishments are frequently incurred by the contrary vices: on which account St. Peter justly asks, *Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good*†? But this, though a right meaning in itself,

* Acts xiv. 17. † 1 Pet. iii. 13.

comes far short of the Apostle's meaning: which is, that whereas the law of nature requires obedience, without giving any certainty of pardon and acceptance on whatever terms, after disobeying; and *the law of* Moses *being added because of transgressions* *, that is, partly to convince men of their transgressions, partly to restrain them from transgressing, increased both the number of duties and the fear of punishment, but afforded only obscure hopes, either of assistance or forgiveness: the Gospel of Christ was revealed, in God's due time, to relieve mankind, on most equitable conditions, from the rigour of the other two: supplying the promise of mercy after failures, taking off the heavy yoke of ritual observances, producing in men the good dispositions required; and expressly assuring them that a perfect obedience would not be expected, but a faithful and sincere one be sufficient, in order to obtain eternal happiness. *Against such,* therefore, as thus possess and exercise the several Christian graces, *there is no law.* For them there is a law, to direct and reward them; against them there is none, to sentence and punish them. The strict demand of the covenant of works is relaxed: the burthen of the Mosaic ordinances is removed: and *the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death* †. Still indeed they are subject to the law, which gave them this freedom: *they are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that they should walk in them* ‡. But this the Apostle considers as a privilege, not a servitude; a privilege, however, necessary to be used: and therefore he expresses very distinctly the nature of it. *There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ*

* Gal. iii. 19. † Rom. viii. 2. ‡ Eph. ii. 10.

*Jesus: who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit**. *For to be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace* †.

Here then is the plain trial of our condition. If we are destitute of *the fruits of the spirit*, it is bad: if we find them in our hearts and lives, we have proof enough of its being good; and need never disquiet ourselves for want of any other. Being able to tell the very moment when we became pious and virtuous is not material, provided we are so now: and happiest of all are they who remember not themselves ever to have been otherwise. A feeling of immediate and sensible assurances of God's favour, so impressed upon us, that we can certainly distinguish it to be of divine original from the manner in which it affects us, may be often vouchsafed, but is no where in Scripture made necessary: and all feelings are imaginary and deceitful, unless they be accompanied with that one, which the Apostle experienced and mentions: *for our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world* ‡. Our Saviour's rule, of *knowing every tree by its fruit* §, is the only sure way to judge of ourselves, as well as others. And though perhaps we may be sometimes at a loss how to judge: or inclined, and even strongly, to fear the worst: yet, if this arise, not from presumptuous sins, or habitual negligence, but merely from excessive humility or weakness of spirits; a modest diffidence will never hinder our future happiness, nor will a bold positiveness ever forward it. Good men may be cast down, and bad men elevated, without any reason. The former may see much in themselves

* Rom. viii. 1. † Rom. viii. 6.
‡ 2 Cor. i. 12. § Luke vi. 44.

to dislike; and yet God may see enough of what he approves to accept them: they may experience but little joy in serving him; and yet *walk* more completely *worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing* *, for doing it without the encouragement of a present reward. The latter, on the other hand, may build upon groundless fancies of their own, mistaking them for divine communications: may be absolutely confident, wonderfully transported, yet find themselves at last fatally deceived. It is not therefore by their fears, or their hopes, or their raptures, that men are to judge of their spiritual condition. *Hereby*, saith St. John, *we do know that we know God, if we keep his commandments* †. *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous: he that committeth sin is of the devil* ‡.

But then we shall miserably cheat ourselves, if we take that for righteousness which is not, or one part of it for the whole. If we mistake a constitutional, or perhaps affected good nature, shewn, it may be, to extravagance on some occasions, and not at all on others, for Christian love, which comprehends every act of justice and mercy: if, with ever so extensive a benevolence to our fellow-creatures, we fail of governing ourselves by the rules of sobriety, temperance and chastity, or thinking of ourselves with due *lowliness of mind* §: if, with the practice of all these duties, we omit the worship of God our Maker, or perform it without inward reverence and affection, or live without an humble sense of our constant dependence upon him; nay, if we pay him all the honour which unassisted reason enjoins; but wilfully reject, or contemptuously slight the doctrines or precepts of

* Col. i. 10. † 1 John ii. 3.
‡ 1 John iii. 7, 8. § Phil. ii. 3.

revelation, or any one of them: or if, professing to receive and observe them all, we are not careful to improve ourselves by them into a Christian frame of mind, with respect both to this world and the next: or if, lastly, with what diligence soever we may labour in every good work, we are not sensible that we can neither succeed without the assistance of God's Spirit, nor be accepted but for the merits of his Son: we must not imagine that he who hath prescribed every article of faith and duty, from knowing them all to be necessary in our case, will permit us to disregard such of them as we shall please, without pronouncing us unworthy of the salvation which he hath offered: and inflicting on us the punishments which he hath threatened. Let every one therefore think, and think most seriously, whether he is indeed such as God requires, in all these particulars: and study to amend, not to flatter himself.

It is very true, *the fruits of the spirit,* mentioned in the text, seem to be wholly moral virtues, and almost wholly those of mutual kindness and humanity. Nor will any rightness of belief, or fervency of devotion, or strictness of life avail us, if we want social goodness and beneficence. But still these last, as the Scripture most evidently shews, are not the only fruits of the Spirit: and therefore we must learn to practise other virtues from other texts, as well as the benevolent virtues from this. It is indeed said, that *against* the observers of *these there is no law.* But then they are supposed to act consistently; to observe every thing else at the same time, that stands on the same foundation: else they observe not even these from the right principle; nor will they be able to observe them in a sufficient degree. Every virtue is connected with every other: and all virtue with piety.

For without the love of God to excite us, and the fear of God to restrain us, and the word of God to direct us, and the grace of God to strengthen us, we shall neither behave to our fellow creatures, nor govern ourselves, in a proper manner. *What therefore He hath joined together, let not us put asunder* *: but *giving all diligence, add to our faith virtue,* or manly boldness in professing it: *and to virtue knowledge* of whatever may adorn and defend it; *and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness* towards our fellow Christians; *and to brotherly kindness, charity* towards all men without exception †. *For so an entrance shall be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* ‡: to which may God for his sake bring us all. Amen.

* Matth. xix. 6. † 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7. ‡ Ibid. 11.

SERMON XI.

ROM. viii. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

WHOEVER believes religion to be true, and thinks with any seriousness concerning it, must needs be earnestly desirous to find out, whether the state of his mind, and the course of his life, be such as God expects and will reward, or forbids and will punish. Now this depends on two things: an acquaintance with ourselves, and with the dispositions of our Maker. *The spirit of man, which is in him, knoweth the things of a man* * : and may also *clearly see, from the creation of the world, the invisible things* of the Author of it, *even his eternal power and Godhead* †; those attributes of his nature, by which his proceedings towards his creatures will be directed. But still the holy Scripture teaches, that the Spirit of God likewise bears a part, highly necessary, in the great work of discovering, what title we have to the mercy and favour of Heaven. It will therefore be requisite to consider this important subject, in the manner which St. Paul hath pointed out to us in the text: and for this end I shall endeavour to shew you,

I. What is implied in being *the children of God.*

II. How far *our* own *spirit* is capable of *bearing witness that we are* such.

* 1 Cor. ii. 11. † Rom. i. 20.

III. What additional *witness* to it *the* divine *Spirit* may *bear*.

I. What is implied in being *the children of God.*

All beings, indued with moral qualifications, and the ability of looking up to the fountain of perfection, are, in a large sense of the word, the children of him, who is *the Father of spirits* *: being *made in his image* †. But as the capacity of resembling him is the very foundation of their guilt, who, instead of improving, wear out the traces of this divine similitude: so they alone are, to any beneficial purpose, *the children of their Father in heaven* ‡, who by imitating his holiness and goodness continue objects of his paternal affection. For that all pious and virtuous persons are thus related to him, our common reason perceives in general: but the more distinct apprehension of the nature and duties and benefits of this relation we owe to Scripture.

There we learn, that God created man *after his likeness* §, not only in respect of *righteousness and true holiness* ‖, but also of happiness and immortality: that the lamentable transgression of our first parents forfeited, for themselves and us, the privileges, which depended on their innocence: and that being all become by their fault prone to sin, we become by our own, more or less actually guilty of it: that the bulk of mankind, forsaking God entirely, made themselves *aliens and strangers* ¶ to him, and *children of that wicked one* **, whose suggestions they chose to obey, and whose temper to copy. But our gracious Maker, pitying even those, who were *enemies* to him and their own souls *by wicked works* ††; and having

* Heb. xii. 9. † Gen. i. 26. ‡ Matth. v. 45.
§ Gen. i. 26. ‖ Eph. iv. 24. ¶ Eph. ii. 12.
** Matth. xiii. 38. †† Col. i. 21.

formed from the beginning a scheme of mysterious wisdom for recovering them again to their duty, and receiving them back into his family; gave them, from time to time, both such admonitions and such promises, for that intent, as he saw their condition required, and the state of their minds would bear: manifesting to them various degrees and proportions of goodness in this respect; as he doth in all others, both to man and the rest of his creatures, for unsearchable reasons.

To those, whom in the course of his providence he left to be directed merely by the light of their own consciences, he certainly did no injury. For as many as in any part of their conduct followed that, and *did by nature the things contained in the law* *, were so far *followers of God as dear children* †. And so many as having departed from the right way, penitently returned to it, had always some ground to hope for pardon from our merciful Father, who *knoweth whereof we are made* ‡. But they, who preserved but the faintest beam of outward revelation also, which at first was universal, to guide their steps and brighten the prospect before them, had much fuller proofs of his parental kindness. And the Jews being favoured with his miraculous protection, and a written law delivered by him, and prophetic instructions superadded, in some measure for the benefit of the Gentile world, as well as their own; he saith of them, in terms of great distinction, *Israel is my son, even my first-born* §. Yet still, as that nation, though wise and good in comparison of others round them, was both in the knowledge and practice of religion very imperfect, and far from maturity: God thought it needful,

* Rom. ii. 14.
† Eph. v. 1.
‡ Psalm ciii. 14.
§ Exod. iv. 22.

while he treated them on that account with indulgence on some points, to exercise in many so strict and severe a government over them, that he rather appeared in the character of a master, than a father; trying to influence them more by the terror of present punishment, than the hope of a future inheritance. And therefore St. Paul expresses their case, with much accuracy, thus: *Now I say, that the heir, so long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be Lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of time was come;* when the Jews were gradually qualified to have a more manly and rational form of religion proposed to them, with more ingenuous motives to the practice of it; when the Gentiles also had received some preparatory cultivation, in their understandings and their manners, from the purer parts of their philosophy, which yet had fully appeared to be insufficient for the reformation of mankind; and when so free a communication was opened between distant parts of the world, that the truth of the Gospel might easily be examined, and its doctrines easily spread; then *God sent forth his Son, to redeem them who were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons* *; to purchase, at the price of his blood, their deliverance from the condemning sentence and the ritual injunctions of the Mosaic dispensation, that they might enjoy under the Christian covenant the strongest marks of God's fatherly regard; and to purchase at the same time, the *deliverance* of the Gentiles from an infinitely worse *bondage*, that of *corruption*, the slavery of sin, and the dread

* Gal. iv. 4, 5.

of eternal death, *into the glorious liberty of the children of God* *.

Thus then did all mankind regain a title to this blessed denomination: the only begotten Son of God condescending to partake of our nature, that we, being thus become his *brethren* †, *might partake of the divine nature* ‡. By his incarnation and death, *he gave to them, who believed on his name*, to use St. John's expression, *power*, or right, *to become the sons of God* §: by instructing us in our duty, he hath furnished us with the outward means of becoming such: by the influence of his holy Spirit, thence called *the Spirit of adoption* ‖, he enables and excites us inwardly to make effectual use of those means; and comforts us with a joyful sense of having done it, and of being authorized to claim the rank of God's children, or, in St. Paul's language, to *cry Abba, Father* ‖; a phrase, in which the Jewish bond-servants might not presume to address their masters ¶. The same happy change is represented sometimes by the figure of a new birth or creation; the dispositions and privileges acquired in it being such, as may well denominate us new creatures, born again to a new life. And as all Christians receive from God in baptism whatever is requisite on his part for this change, and profess to act suitably to his goodness; they are so far justly said to be regenerated and begotten of him. But if afterwards they act otherwise, *in this are manifest the children of God, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God* **. None but religious and virtuous persons then are effectually *begotten again to an inheritance in heaven* ††; and of

* Rom. viii. 21. † Heb. ii. 11. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 4.
§ John i. 12. ‖ Rom. viii. 15.
¶ Sel. de Suec. in Bona Def. c. 4. ** 1 John iii. 10.
†† 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

these only, the Apostle's reasoning was intended to hold, *if children, then heirs* *. For as by ceasing to be like God in purity and holiness, our first parents and we ceased to be like him in happiness and immortality: so by returning in the first of these respects to his image, exhibited to us in the person of our dear Redeemer, we shall be restored to it in the latter also; *and as we have borne the image of the earthy man, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly* †. It *is* indeed *appointed unto* all *men once to die* ‡: but we shall not continue under this *sentence of the Lord over all flesh* §: but rising again to an endless life, become in the completest sense, as our Saviour urges, *the children of God, being the children of the resurrection* ‖. *Behold* then, *what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God—Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear, what we shall be: but we know, that when He shall appear, we shall be like him* ¶. We do not indeed, and probably cannot, conceive distinctly the nature of our future state; but this general description, that *we shall be like him*, comprehends every thing that we can wish. And be we ever so ignorant of the particulars of what we shall enjoy, it is happiness unspeakable to think only from what we shall be freed; when *God*, as he hath promised, *shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain* **. It follows in the same place of Scripture: *and he, that sat upon the throne, said,—These words are true and faithful.—He, that overcometh, shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son* ††.

* Rom. viii. 17. † 1 Cor. xv. 49. ‡ Heb. ix. 27.
§ Ecclus. xli. 3. ‖ Luke xx. 36. ¶ 1 John iii. 1, 2.
** Rev. xxi. 4. †† Rev. xxi. 5. 7.

Since therefore such great privileges are implied in being *the children of God*, let us now inquire,

II. How far *our* own *spirit* is capable of *bearing witness, that we are* such.

The prophet indeed hath said very truly, *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it* * ? But though it be often extremely difficult to find out the dispositions and intentions of other men, when they are bad; and indeed our own, in proportion as we are bad (because in such cases all arts of concealment are used, and we can sometimes conceal things very strangely even from ourselves); yet with a good-will we may discern ourselves tolerably well. Of our own deliberate actions we cannot but be conscious at the time; our intentions, if we examine them, will be no impenetrable secret to us. And that uncertain state of mind, in which we have either no formed intention, or several not very consistent, each of us may discover to be just what it is. Then for our past conduct: though many particulars may have been forgotten by us, yet its general turn and complexion we can certainly recollect, if we please. And whoever doth but take some honest pains, after this, to compare what he hath been and is with what his conscience and the word of God informed him he should be, will not fail of being competently acquainted with his own condition. Indeed no one doubts, but he can know himself in other respects: whether, for instance, he honours his parents, and loves his friends, and desires to perform his duty, towards them: and why then should he despair of knowing, whether he honours and loves God, and serves him with sincerity?

But many have no mind to do his will, and yet a great mind to believe themselves in his favour. Now

* Jer. xvii. 9.

undoubtedly such may *deceive their own hearts* *, especially at times, with much ease. But they might also, if they were inclined to it, undeceive them again very soon; by putting proper questions home to themselves; by carrying it in mind, that their interest is to search out the real truth; and by endeavouring to consider their own case, as if it were that of another, for whom they had no partial tenderness. Some again are at a loss concerning their spiritual state, because they are uncertain about such or such points of their duty. But as these will not often be many or important; so if they were, by making proper application they may receive satisfaction. And in the mean time, without knowing which opinion is right, they may know whether personally they are innocent or excusable; by reflecting, whether they have taken such care, as their circumstances permit, to inform themselves and judge as well as they could; whether they violate no plain obligations, for the sake of doubtful ones; and whether in all matters of obscurity they keep to the safer side.

There is yet a third sort of people, and much to be pitied, who labour, with the utmost solicitude, to do every thing they should; and yet enjoy no manner of comfort. Sometimes they will even deny, that they are at all in earnest about religion: though their concern, at imagining they are not, is a full proof that they are. And this arises generally from a disorder in the body, affecting the mind: of which however it is exceedingly hard to convince them, because, it may be, they are otherwise tolerably in health. But if happily they can be brought, though against their own persuasion, to take medical advice; the relief, which they commonly find, shews by experience,

* James i. 26.

where the defect lay. Sometimes again their uneasiness, though ill-grounded, proceeds from a different cause. They read, in devotional books, confessions of sin, acknowledging such heinous degrees of guilt, as too many have incurred, but they have not: however they repeat the whole inconsiderately, though much of it was intended only for others; and so by accusing themselves of what they have never done, come to fancy themselves what they never were. And a further mistake, too frequent, is, that the pious authors of such treatises expressing for the most part very warmly, in the prayers composed by them, those devout affections, of which they probably felt an unusual share; persons, not liable by nature to such strong emotions, imagine themselves totally destitute of real piety. Or if they were formerly fervent in sacred exercises, and now, as they go on towards the decline of their days, are less so: they grow suspicious, that whatever vigour and life there was once in their profession of religion, it is all gone; and their case become bad, perhaps desperate. And thus, while the general fault of mankind is to have much ground for fear, and yet no fear at all: these poor wretches, often with no ground for any, have more than they are able to support.

Now where this proceeds, in any considerable measure, from constitution: their own thinking and reading upon the subject will but make bad worse: and others arguing with them about it, though ever so rightly, will not make things much better. The only effectual way therefore is, to prevail on them, if possible, to have some little regard for the judgment of serious and prudent friends, though in opposition to their own, till they can use it better; and suffer their thoughts to be turned for a time, while other means

are using, to things of smaller importance and even of harmless amusement. For the strong exertion either of a mind or body, originally weak, or accidentally over-strained, will only produce a still worse feebleness. Moderate relaxation therefore is in these circumstances a real duty: how apt soever the parties concerned may be to look on it as a sin: for which reason it ought to be recommended with great prudence and caution. But on the other hand, it must not be conceived, that all concern of men about their spiritual state proceeds from bodily indisposition. For this would be a fatal mistake. There may be, and God knows frequently is, but too much foundation for such concern: and then the sole cure is earnest prayer for pardon and grace, and diligent study of better obedience. Or if there be no just foundation; the appearance of the contrary may flow wholly or chiefly from erroneous notions; which can only be overcome by suitable arguments. And these errors indeed are various: but as they principally relate to the articles of repentance, faith and love to God; so the following considerations will go far towards removing them: that whatever faults people heartily wish, from a sense of duty to their Maker, Redeemer and Sanctifier, they had never committed, and take effectual care never to commit again designedly, they have as truly repented of them as possible; and whether their sorrow were ever so calm or ever so passionate, makes no essential difference: that a true faith in Christ is known by its fruits; and if it purifies the soul and life, however weak, is undoubtedly genuine: that love to God, as well as man, consists, not in ecstasies and transports, of which bad persons may have strange fits, and good ones little or nothing; but in a steady exercise of real regard and right behaviour to the object of our affection.

By these means then we may all be enabled to judge, in a considerable measure, what manner of men we have been and are: for this depends on the proper use of our faculties concerning a point, within our reach. But the further question, how God will deal with such, is one of a quite different sort: to which reason unassisted can return but a very general and indeterminate answer. Blameless creatures indeed are secure of their Creator's kindness: but in what degree, or for what duration, even they of themselves cannot know. Much less then may sinners, as we are, presume to indulge high hopes of our own forming, when we have so much cause for dread and fearful expectation. It is true, repentance and amendment, if they proceed from right principles, do renew in us the image of our heavenly Father, so far as they go: and his goodness will not permit us to despair of his returning children being received by him. But whether our return, after the offences that we have committed, be such as he can accept: or if it be, what correction he may first inflict upon us in a life to come; to what rank in his family he may then vouchsafe to re-admit us, or how long or how little a time he may continue to us the being, which we have forfeited; our own spirit can never teach us with any certainty. And therefore it concerns us beyond expression to inquire,

III. What additional *witness the* divine *Spirit bears, that we are the children of God.*

Now having originally borne witness, in the strongest manner, to the truth of the Gospel, by his predictions of it before it appeared, and his miraculous operations attending the delivery of it to the world, he bears irrefragable witness by consequence to every succeeding age, that all, who sincerely believe and obey it, are, notwithstanding their former

sins, and present imperfections, *washed white in the blood of the Lamb, and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them* *: they shall be led, by his paternal care, in safety, through all the temptations and difficulties of this world; and inherit, in the world to come, a blessed immortality in their Father's house. Then besides this general testimony, the Holy Spirit hath attested more especially a truth of infinite importance to us, and much doubted by the first Christians for some years, that the Gentile world hath an equal right to God's promises with the Jews: of which it was an early and full proof, that he imparted his gifts and graces to both equally, *putting no difference between them* †. And this, in all likelihood, is what St. Paul more peculiarly designed to assert in the text. But the Spirit not only gives these external evidences of our acceptance, but assists us inwardly to know our true state towards God, of which we might else be often fatally ignorant. And for this reason David prays so earnestly, *Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well, if there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting* ‡. For the same Spirit, after shewing us what we are, enables us by his influences, to become what we should be. *For we are not sufficient of ourselves* even *to think any thing* § with effect: but by his co-operation we come to have the only sure argument, that we in particular are the children of God. The virtues and graces of a good heart and life are that distinguishing mark of true Christians, on account of which they are said in Scripture to be *sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest*

* Rev. vii. 14, 15.
† Acts xv. 9.
‡ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.
§ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

of our inheritance *. For as our happiness hereafter shall consist in the same temper, in which our duty consists now: he who is really, though imperfectly, possessed of that temper, *hath* already received *the first fruits of the Spirit* †; and tasted in some measure of what he shall enjoy abundantly. Whoever therefore *walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit* ‡, having his *conversation* such *as becomes the Gospel of Christ* §, *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made him free from the law of sin and death* ‖; and of this *he hath the witness in himself* ¶, if he will attend to it. Else indeed, a timorous disposition, or a feeble body affecting the mind, may disquiet him: but still, ever so great fears will no more endanger the salvation of a good man, than ever so great assurance will prevent the punishment of a wicked one. If any one is inclined then to suspicions and apprehensions concerning his title to God's favour, without knowing why; or can charge himself with nothing, when he sets about it, but such defects and failures, as the Scripture shews, and persons of known piety and discretion can assure him, are consistent with a state of religion, let him reject such imaginations entirely, if he is able. If he is not, let him bear them as afflictions, but never yield to them as truths; or fancy on account of such things, that his condition is bad, and God hath forsaken him. For there can hardly be a surer proof to the contrary, than that God preserves his conscience tender, and his life clear of wilful sin.

As to that reviving comfort and delightful satisfaction, which people of this turn complain they do not experience, and are apt erroneously to consider,

* Eph. i. 13, 14. † Rom. viii. 23. ‡ Rom. viii. 1.
§ Phil. i. 27. ‖ Rom. viii. 2. ¶ 1 John v. 10.

as the only favourable witness of the Spirit: it is indeed sometimes a present reward, which God bestows on his servants. But no safe conclusion can be drawn from the most agreeable of these perceptions, without a faithful care to serve him: and they, who go on to serve him faithfully without any of them, give a more acceptable demonstration of the sincerity of their zeal, than if they enjoyed them all the while in the highest degree. For equal obedience with less encouragement is certainly of the most value. When therefore he, who best knows, judges it needful, you shall partake of those religious pleasures that you desire. But in the meanwhile, believe, as you have cause, that withholding them is for your benefit: and indeed be assured of this, that both having them and being destitute of them proceeds very much from natural constitution, or the different temperature of different ages of life, or from using or not using particular methods of devotion, which have small connection with essential goodness. Accordingly, many a one, who seldom or never feels much of any consolations within, that warm him very sensibly, and move his passions very powerfully, may have, notwithstanding, on most solid grounds, a calm and composed satisfaction and *joy in the Holy Ghost**, which *shall be in him,* to use our Saviour's words, *a well of water, springing up into everlasting life*†; and perhaps many another, who hath often been full of inexpressible transports, will find himself at last fatally deceived by a vain confidence. For the dictates of a heated fancy, be they ever so positive, can do nothing to counterbalance the guilt of a sinful life: and all persuasions to the contrary, are not from the divine Comforter, but our

* Rom. xiv. 17. † John iv. 14.

own bad hearts, or the wicked one. *For the Holy Spirit of discipline will remove from thoughts, that are without understanding; and will not abide, when unrighteousness cometh in* *. He never leads us to any sentiment or action, but what reason and Scripture warrant; nor can any assurance, that we may imagine he communicates to us, of our belonging to God, continue well-founded one moment longer, than we continue keeping God's commandments: which therefore that we may all do always, He of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

* Wisd. i. 5.

SERMON XII.

MATT. vii. 12.

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

THE largest number of particular directions can never possibly equal the infinite variety of circumstances, in which human creatures are concerned to act: nor can the memories of most retain any considerable part of those, which might be given. And therefore, though the utmost care were taken to specify to us our several obligations, we must be left after all to find out many of them ourselves, by deducing them from general rules. And these (when they carry in them the evidence of their own truth and rightness) at the same time that they extend our knowledge to cases, which have not been distinctly mentioned to us, afford us also a clearer conviction of our duty in such as we have: by shewing us, that the different commands, to which we are subjected, flow from the same source, and carry the same reasonableness along with them.

Our blessed Saviour therefore, after delivering separately, in his Sermon on the Mount, all the chief precepts of the most exalted and refined morality, takes care, just before the conclusion of it, to com-

prehend the whole both of what he had said and what he had omitted, concerning the ties of men to each other, in one universal law of life. *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them.* Not that he was the first who made any use of this amiable maxim. God forbid the world should have been ignorant of so necessary and so plain a direction for their behaviour, till that time. Both Jews and heathens had seen its equity, and felt its force, in some degree. But still more was wanting to complete its usefulness: and that our Lord supplied. Most, if not all other teachers, had expressed it in the negative form: as Tobit, for instance, *Do that to no man, which thou hatest* *. And so it served only to restrain mutual injuries. But he laid it down in the affirmative, as an injunction also of proper kindnesses. They spoke of it no otherwise than incidentally, and without ascribing any singular prerogative to it. But he recommended it, as taking in the entire compass of social virtue. They could support it only by argument: but he hath added the sanction of divine authority. In these respects therefore it is peculiarly the law of our gracious Redeemer. But whether we consider it as a precept of his religion, or as one of the primitive dictates of reason and nature: in either view we are bound to pay it a conscientious regard. And the right manner of shewing this regard is,

I. To form a just notion of its meaning.

II. To fix in our hearts a due sense of its obligation.

III. To consider its importance well.

IV. To regulate our practice by it in the various relations and occurrences of life.

* Tob. iv. 15.

On the three former of these points I shall discourse now: on the last, God willing, the next opportunity.

I. I shall endeavour to assist you in forming a just notion of this rule. Not that it wants explanation, as being obscure and difficult: but that mankind, in order to excuse their disobedience to it, are very apt to put false interpretations upon it; and so either pervert it into a wrong direction, or perplex it till it becomes none at all.

Some men, if we may judge by their conduct, apprehend themselves bound only to behave towards others, as they are willing others should behave towards them in their present condition. The rich and great, for example, have perhaps no favours to ask of a considerable part of their inferiors: and therefore too often seem to think, they need not bestow any favours upon them. They agree, they say, to the reasonableness of doing as they would be done by: and therefore, if they desire no service from such and such persons, they owe no service to them. But the rule is (and they know it is), not, "treat others "as you would wish them to treat you, circumstances "being what they are;" but, "as you would wish "them to treat you, circumstances being changed "on each side." This makes a great alteration.

Perhaps they will reply, that they are content, if circumstances ever should change, to receive the treatment which they give. Therefore they will overlook the poor and needy now, and they allow the world to overlook them, when they become such. They will revenge themselves of their enemies, while they have power; and let them, if ever it comes to their turn, repay the vengeance. But here again, they know in their consciences the rule means, not

that they shall act as they may think, or rather say, they shall be willing to have others act towards them, supposing circumstances *should* change, which they trust they never will: but as they would have them act, supposing circumstances *were* changed. And in that case they would wish for the very kindest behaviour, whatever they may beforehand either pretend or imagine.

But even on the supposition of an actual change, there are people, who can misinterpret this rule in such a manner, as would make the application of it sometimes a most pernicious thing. Every magistrate, were he in the place of the criminal, who appears before him, would wish not to be punished. Every virtuous man, were he a vicious one, would wish to be indulged and assisted in his vices. Every one of us perhaps would be glad, if he could, to have his will on all occasions. Ought we therefore to gratify all the inclinations of others, because we should like to have all our own gratified? Or if not, is not the rule an erroneous one, as implying this? Why, according to their different ways of thinking, some will be apt to prefer the former of these opinions, and some the latter. But neither is well grounded. For though indeed a magistrate, were he in the place of the offender, would wish to escape with impunity, yet this is not the only supposition he hath to make. Let him suppose himself also in the place of such, as may be then or afterwards injured by the offender, if he escapes punishment; or of such, as the precedent of his impunity may tempt others to injure: let him reflect, how the rule before us enjoins him to act with regard to those innocent persons, and he will never be misled by whatever tenderness it may seem to enjoin him with

regard to the guilty. Again, though if we were in the place of any of our vicious acquaintance, we should be glad to be assisted in our vices; yet suppose we were in the place of those, whom their vices corrupt, or impoverish, or grieve, or make any way miserable: should we then be glad, that other people should assist in bringing this misery upon us? If not, the precept of doing as we would be done by, far from requiring us to give such assistance ourselves, absolutely prohibits it. Serving our friends, when they ought not to be served; and raising those in the world, from partial fondness, who ought not to be raised, passes, I am afraid, too commonly for great good nature: and is defended, or excused, because it is treating them as we should desire to be treated by them. But then it is treating their worthier competitors, and all such as may suffer by the faults or incapacity of their favourites, which perhaps many, perhaps the public may, it is treating them as we should abhor to be treated. We must therefore understand this rule to mean that we take into our consideration, not barely the parties who appear and press for the benefit of it, but whoever else is concerned, if any be: and *do*, not to one or some only, but *to all men, as we would that they should do to us.*

But here it may possibly be objected again, that if we imagine ourselves to be successively in the situation of different persons, we shall of consequence desire different and contrary things in reference to the same affair: so that behaving towards every one interested in it, as we should, in their circumstances, desire, that they would behave towards us, is impracticable: that therefore on such occasions, which are not rare, the rule is in effect no rule: and that

farther, on several others it is a very bad one. For suppose any one to desire of us, what would be hurtful to no third person, but to himself, or to us: must we comply with his desire, because, if we were exactly in his stead, we should have the same desire? Certainly not. But then such cases as these, not only happen in comparison but seldom, and therefore cannot mislead, or even perplex us often: but when they do happen, instead of overturning the rule, they point out to us a very important limitation of it, which was doubtless originally intended in it, and will secure it from ever being overturned. And this is, that the phrase, *whatsoever ye would*, must not be extended to mean whatever we can possibly wish, but whatever we can equitably and allowably wish. It is to be understood of proper, not of unfit inclinations: for what we are forbidden to desire, we are deemed in this precept not to desire.

The full and distinct purport of it then, the sense in which all the world understand it, excepting when they have a mind to misunderstand it, is; "whatever "treatment you should on cool deliberation think "you had reasonable ground to claim or hope from "each person concerned in the affair before you, were "he now in your condition and you in his, be that "which you give him no less honest and kind."

II. The meaning of the rule being ascertained, the next point is, to fix in our hearts a due sense of its obligation.

Now the proof of its obligation lies in a very small compass, which is one great recommendation of it: and therefore I shall spend much fewer words upon it than a separate head of discourse usually requires. Most evidently, in whatever manner it is fit to treat any person in any circumstances, it is fit to treat in

the like manner any other person, supposing him in all the same circumstances: for he is in regard to every consideration of duty, as it were, the same person. There is no need then of saying (what yet is very true, and would, if it were wanted, be very material) that all men are absolutely equal in many things, nearly equal in most *; that in whatever they are unequal, the inequality is of very uncertain duration, and by no means always acknowledged (for scarce any one upon the whole would willingly be any person else, that could be named to him): and therefore we ought to act towards each other, for the greatest part entirely, and always nearly, as being on the level; and if we do not, those with whom we have concerns, and society in general, will never be easy and happy. Such reflections go somewhat beyond, or fall somewhat wide of, what is needful to establish the precept in question: which only requires this very brief and plain demonstration of its justness, indeed so brief and plain, as hardly to need being given in form: that wherever the case is in all respects the same (as in order to make use of this rule we must in the first place imagine it to be), there the right behaviour must be the same too: and whether it be one person or another, I or my neighbour, who is really in that case, makes no difference in the answer to the question, what the behaviour should be. This cannot be denied, and therefore ought not to be forgotten or overlooked. For whatever is true, and relates to our practice, we feel ourselves bound by nature to observe in our practice. And the God of nature, who hath made us and every thing what we are, must expect us to act suitably to what he

* Nihil enim est unum uni tam simile, tam par, quam omnes inter nosmet ipsos sumus. Cic. de Leg. i. 10.

hath made us: and if that were not enough to determine our judgment, he hath farther told us expressly by his beloved Son, that he expects us to live with one another according to this rule. Nor (which completes our obligation) hath he left us any room to doubt, but that in every thing, as we obey or disobey, he will reward or punish: and certainly in a greater or smaller degree, as the matter is more or less important. Let us therefore now,

III. Consider well the importance of the precept before us.

Indeed the stamp of divine authority upon it, especially joined with the annexed declaration, that it contains the substance of all, that *the law and prophets* have taught concerning our mutual behaviour, may fully assure us, even before we make any particular enquiry, that its moment is remarkably great. And yet there seems to lie a plausible objection against it: that as it only enjoins men to do to others what they see would be right for others to do to them; the question still remains, what that right part is: that where this is known, the rule of the text is needless; and where it is not known, we have no more direction for our conduct, than we had before; but are only perplexed with an imaginary change of persons to no purpose.

Now it must be confessed, that if we had neither by nature nor by revelation any sense or knowledge at all of right and wrong in particular cases, this rule could not give us any; nor could we understand it any otherwise, than very grossly and imperfectly: but still it would be of some, and no small use to us. For if we knew nothing else, at least we should know what we desired; we should know too, that in the main we were all alike: and by treating

each other as we merely wished (without considering how reasonably) to be treated in return, we should for the most part do tolerably well; please those around us, and make ourselves easy. Sometimes indeed, for want of distinguishing, what wishes were fit, and what unfit, we should act extremely ill: but in comparison perhaps not very often. And upon the whole, where we had no particular precepts, this general one would be the best that we could follow, even though we could not apprehend its full import.

But the delivery of it to us presupposes, and very justly, that in the main the contrary is true: that all mankind perceive, in some good degree, one sort of behaviour to be commendable, another blamable; some things right to be done, others wrong. And hence arises, instead of an objection, the principal use of our Saviour's rule. For it enables us to apply these perceptions, where otherwise we should not know how; and inclines us to apply them justly, where otherwise we should have misapplied them.

Though we every one of us have the perceptions, yet to form distinct notions of the proper measures and objects of them; to discover how far they are mere conclusions of the understanding; and how far dictates of passions or affections, which ought to be corrected and moderated by the understanding; to make a rational examination of the several interfering circumstances of a case, and judge in that manner how we are to be moved, and how to act; is a work, for which the bulk of mankind is totally unqualified. The different opinions entertained by speculative inquiries concerning the precise nature, foundation, limits of moral obligation, run into niceties, that are altogether beyond common apprehension. And of those, who can be amused

with them, few, if any, have skill to proceed upon them in the ordinary affairs of life. The great thing therefore, which the world needs for practice, is, not a complete system of virtue, regularly drawn out, and strictly demonstrated; but a familiar palpable instruction, what people are to do in such matters, as chiefly come before them. Now the rule of the text will instruct them, without studying the theory and grounds of virtuous affection at all, to show such affection notwithstanding, when it is requisite; and to conduct as they should what they are concerned in, without troubling themselves about refinements, which they may never be concerned in. Seriously asking ourselves, and waiting for a serious answer from within, how we should think it reasonable for others to behave towards us in the business, in which we must behave one way or another towards them, will excite in us a very peculiar kind of attention to it; will awaken our faculties to judge of this question with much more certainty, than we could of the more abstracted ones, upon which the philosophical solution of it may depend; and throw a strong light on the point before us, how little soever we may discern in relation to others, with which perhaps it is closely connected. At least it will cause us to feel experimentally what we ought to do, whether we see it speculatively, or not.

But further, the observation of this precept will not only set our minds to work upon the subject, (and yet many want that to be done for them;) but, which is a greater benefit still, will singularly preserve them from working unfairly. The love, that we bear to ourselves, our zeal for the persons and things which we like, and our vehemence against those which we dislike, hinder us perpetually from

discovering what is our duty, where else it would be most evident; and constitute our principal danger of judging amiss. Now, if there can be in the world a method of securing us against this danger, our Saviour's rule is that method. Viewing only one face of an object is apt to deceive us; therefore we are directed to view it on the reverse too. Considering a case as our own gives us a bias: suppose then the contrary to be our own; and our second thoughts will correct the first. Self-love is what usually carries us wrong: but the rule prescribed us converts that very passion into an instrument of setting us right: by placing in their turns, before our eyes, two selfs to decide between (if the expression may be allowed) the real and the fictitious one. The appearances of reason, which arise from the circumstances favourable to our own side, engross our attention: let imagination therefore change the side, and we shall attend to the opposite appearances. The inward feelings, which we have, of our own interest, our own honour, our own sufferings, of whatever relates to ourselves, are so very strong, that we quite forget, how the same feelings affect the other party. But this admirable contrivance of a feigned experience enables and obliges us to feel for each party successively, and thus to become impartial judges. Farther than this we cannot go in combating selfish prejudices, and therefore a more perfect direction than this cannot be given.

But, besides being a most excellent and obvious rule to guide and try ourselves by, it is likewise a most natural and easy one for others, friends or opposers, to suggest to us: who thus, one should think, might immediately shame us into doing right, only by putting a question to our consciences, which is

altogether inoffensive, and yet must produce, if we are guilty, unavoidable conviction.

But here indeed it must be acknowledged, that some people, especially at times, are wicked and wild enough to reject, with indignation, even the most respectful proposals of their trying a case by any law, but their own will and pleasure: and that others may pretend to have made in their thoughts this change of persons, which our Lord enjoins, and yet not have made it in earnest. They may say (for it is very soon said), that they have already sufficiently examined the matter; and should be well content to receive the treatment, which they propose to give: that they cannot but know, whether they have consulted and answered themselves, and they are under no obligation to consult or answer any one else: the rule recommended to them makes every man his own judge, and they have judged accordingly, as well as they are able, and are very clear in their sentiments. Now undoubtedly every one, that will, may assert this, or any thing, falsely. And it is very true, that the direction in the text is of no manner of use, as none can be, to those who are absolutely resolved not to be directed. But such as have any fairness of heart remaining, let them be otherwise ever so far gone at any time in unreasonableness, may possibly still be brought to themselves, by having it put home to them: "Would you really be willing, that others, if "they had power, should determine concerning you, "in the same haughty and careless, or the same angry "and vehement disposition, which you now show con-"cerning them?" You say you would: but is it not in order to maintain your ground any how, when you are pressed? For your own sake, as well as your neighbour's, deal fairly with yourself: and remem-

ber, that God sees infallibly, whether you do; nay, that men will guess, and seldom err. If you are cool, search whether interest or contempt or indolence do not secretly warp your judgment; and think whether they ought. If you are warm, first compose your heart, and then consult it. Wait without acting, till the tempest is over; and when you hear within you the *small still voice* *, that follows, be assured, that then, and not before, God and your conscience speak to you, and tell you what you should do. But were such remonstrances to prove ever so vain, it would be no just objection against the usefulness of the rule. For if the proud, or covetous, or thoughtless, or passionate, will not apply it fairly; much less will they apply any other. And if they could be persuaded to apply it, as none have so much need of it, none would receive so much advantage from it.

But a farther objection may be, that not only some cannot be induced to make trial of this change of persons; but others, who in all appearance make it as well as they can, do not succeed in it: but either draw wrong conclusions, or know not how to draw any. Yet surely in general, if ever there was a precept, that required little time and pains to comprehend and practise it, such is that before us. *The commandment which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither far off;—but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it* †. Still some attention and care is requisite in every thing. And one point, to which we should attend with very great care, is, in asking the question, "Would we be treated thus?" to lay aside as much as possible, out of our thoughts, that the

* 1 Kings xix. 11, &c. † Deut. xxx. 11. 14.

answer given to it is immediately to be turned the other way. Unless we do this, it may be feared, we shall seldom answer honestly; at least, unless we diligently recollect at the same time, that where doing right is most contrary to our present interest or inclination, it will contribute most to our present honour and peace of conscience, and to our future and final happiness. Another very needful caution is, that in order to find, what our judgment would be, were all circumstances changed, we must be sure to leave out no circumstances, that are material, in favour of the opposite side. Most of them indeed will flow into our mind of themselves, provided it be fairly opened to them. However we must honestly seek for the remainder, nay suppose them, if we have reason, though they do not appear; dwell upon each of them so as to feel its proper force, and then determine.

But here one plea more may be alleged: that sometimes men cannot reckon up all circumstances, and therefore cannot place themselves in the condition of the other: they know it not sufficiently to say, what they should think, if they were in it. Why this, it must be owned, doth happen. And though we may pretend ignorance falsely, to excuse ourselves from trying what we foresee would go against us: yet they must be very partial or very inconsiderate, who are not frequently sensible, that they want knowledge of facts, or skill to judge concerning them: or at least have cause to doubt, whether the opinion, that seems to them the most likely, be indeed the true one. But even here our Saviour's rule will be of great service. For if we endeavour to make use of it, and find we cannot with any certainty; we shall at least be strongly reminded of our own fal-

liability: and our doubt in determining which is in strictness the right part, will direct us, without any doubt, to take the mild, the gentle, the good-natured part, as being the safest error, should it prove one. However, there are methods of assisting our judgments considerably. If we have formerly been in the condition, in which we now desire to place ourselves; we must recollect what we thought then. If we know any wise and good persons, who are in that condition at present; we must observe or enquire, what they think; and presume, that we should think like them, were we situated like them. The general persuasion of mankind should always have more than a little weight with us, where it is not evidently wrong. And most of us have great need, in supposing that the contrary case was ours, to make large allowances for its not being really ours, and therefore not striking us near so strongly, as that which is.

By the help of such precautions as these, duly observed, we should so very seldom either mistake, or hesitate in the use of the precept before us, that every day would afford us new proof of our Lord's declaration concerning it: *This is the law and the prophets:* to which one of the oldest and most eminent of the Jewish doctors * approached very nearly, when he said, *This is the law: the rest is the explication of it.* But here it cannot be meant, that by this method we are to learn our duty either to God, with whom it would be shocking irreverence to suppose a change of persons; or to ourselves, where there is no other person to change with; but merely

* R. Hillel, the elder, said to live about the time of Christ. This saying is cited from the Talmudic tract intitled, Schabbath, by Vorst. de Ad. NS. c. 10., and Otho Lex. Rabb. in *Odium.*

to our fellow creatures. And our Saviour, who hath elsewhere told us that the love of our Maker *is the first and great commandment* *, and hath enjoined the strictest moral government of those inclinations which are confined the most entirely within our own breasts, could never intend to tell us in the text, that right behaviour to our neighbour was the sole thing, about which we need be solicitous. And therefore he could only design to say, that this rule would point out to us the whole of what Heaven required of us, respecting that behaviour. Just as if, in common life, we were told on any occasion, "This "is all that you have to do;" we must apprehend the words, however general, to signify, all that belonged to the point, which was then in the mind of the person who spoke; not all that belonged to other points, about which, at that instant, he had no thoughts of speaking.

And that, by means of this one precept, we may steer with innocence through all the dangers of social life, I hope you have sufficiently seen cause to believe, though a fuller examination into particulars will give you fuller satisfaction. It only remains, that we apply it faithfully to that purpose in our continual intercourse with each other, in our daily self-examinations, in the solemn preparations of our hearts for the Lord's Supper: begging of God, in the appointed Gospel manner, that pardon for our many transgressions of this and all his holy laws, and that grace to observe them better for the future, which our failures and weakness render so needful: giving glory to him, and humbly taking comfort to ourselves, when our endeavours have proved successful. These things we must each resolve to practise

* Matth. xxii. 38.

conscientiously, if we regard either present happiness, or future: if we desire to avoid the bad opinion of those around us, who will unanimously censure our transgression of so plain a rule; the reproaches of our own hearts, of which it is an obvious dictate; or his final condemnation, who *is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things* *.

* 1 John iii. 20.

SERMON XIII.

MATTH. vii. 12.

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

THE meaning, obligation, and importance of this precept of our blessed Lord have been already shewn you: and are indeed pretty generally acknowledged. Most men admit, applaud, and urge it to others: the only thing wanting is that without which all the rest will be nothing, to practise it themselves. This last point therefore I have reserved to insist on separately. There are few indeed, that can bear to transgress a direction so evidently just, with their eyes quite open: and those who can, there is little hope of amending. But many are either too inconsiderate, or too vehement, to think of it, and apply it to their own case, without admonition; who yet may be shewn what is right, though they would not look for it: and bringing home to such, those equitable considerations, which this rule suggests, will be doing for them all we need. It is very true, there is no possibility of going through the whole extent of a commandment, that reaches to every single occurrence, in which we have intercourse one with another; or, in our Saviour's language, *is* itself *the law and the prophets*. But applying it to the more com-

mon circumstances of life, may give, though possibly no new knowledge, yet many seasonable warnings to all, who happen to be in the circumstances which shall be mentioned, and will honestly make use of those plain rules, to direct themselves, which shall now be laid before you, to direct whom they may.

Men are to be considered, either, first, as superiors or inferiors, or secondly, as equals. And the rule of the text points out to all these their proper mutual behaviour. Again superiors are such, either in authority, or only in rank. And authority is either public or domestic.

Now the conduct of men in any sort of public authority is of so great importance to so many persons, in so many different ways, and they have such variety of temptations, to divert their attention from it, or incline them to a wrong sort of attention; that they cannot ask themselves too seriously, or too often: Is my treatment of all those, whose happiness may be more or less affected by it, the same, which I should reasonably wish for, were I in their condition? At the first view, perhaps, punishment seems right to me: but were I in the offender's case, would not forgiveness seem righter? Or, tenderness appears an amiable thing; but were I the party injured or endangered, would not justice appear a necessary one? I think myself entitled to such profits, or such leisure, but what should I think, were another to insist on either, and I to suffer by it? Do I consider, in general, how easily my passion, selfishness or partiality, my less voluntary errors, or mere indolent neglects, may distress people in a manner that I should feel to be most grievous? The station, I am in, is a trust: do I discharge it with that diligence and steadiness,

that integrity and disinterestedness, that mildness and patience, that sense of human fallibility, that readiness to see and correct my own mistakes, that vigilance to do and encourage whatever is laudable, which I should justly expect from another? Can I say to myself, after a faithful examination, that I only wish a return suitable to my behaviour? And can I say to him, whose servant I am here below, *Think upon me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people* * ?

But then, at the same time, persons, under authority also should ask their hearts, before they accuse those above them of not acting thus: am I sure, both of my being well informed, how they have acted, and well qualified to judge, how they ought to have acted? May there not possibly be things very worthy of consideration in the case, which I have never reflected upon, perhaps have never had the means of knowing? And how would it sit upon my mind, if my inferiors were to pass a peremptory and severe sentence upon me, without being better acquainted with the reasons and circumstances of my conduct, than I am with those of the conduct of my superiors? But suppose them in fault, should I be willing to have all my faults exaggerated to the utmost; without any consideration had, how natural it is to commit them, how hard it is to avoid them; without any regard paid to what I had done or meant well? And should I further think it reasonable, that my betters should be attentive solely to the errors of my behaviour, without weighing their own towards me? If not, it behoves me to watch over mine towards them: and promote the welfare of society in the small sphere that belongs to me, leaving others

* Neh. v. 19.

to do it in their larger ones. Nay, were they to mismanage ever so grossly, yet if I contribute, either through resentment, ambition, or inconsiderateness, to make bad worse; I shall treat, if not those whom I suppose to be guilty, yet many whom I know to be innocent, as I should esteem it very wrong for them to treat me.

Thus much of superiors and inferiors in public life. The first private and domestic relation of inequality is that between husbands and wives: with respect to whom our Saviour's rule most evidently directs, that, on one side, the inequality be as obligingly concealed, on the other, as cheerfully acknowledged, as possible; and that on both, that fidelity, that agreeableness, that mildness, that prudence, that constant attention to their common interests, temporal and eternal, and those of their joint offspring, be shewn, which each of them hath so very just reason to claim, from the nature of the thing, from the precepts of Scripture, from their mutual, deliberate, solemn promises and vows. There is no state in which the two parties have so painful a sense of the wrongs they suffer; there is none in which they are so often reminded, one way or other, of the wrongs they do: therefore few words are needful to instruct them how to apply the direction before us; and none can express fully enough their obligation to apply it conscientiously; and to search the bottom of their souls, whether they have or not.

The second species of domestic authority is that of parents over their children. Now parents may easily suppose themselves in their children's condition; for they have been in it. Whatever therefore appeared to you grievous then, and on cool reflexion appears so still, you will surely never so much as

think of doing; but remember, not only what you underwent; but how wrong it was, that you should. If indeed you have seen the wisdom since of restraints, that you once thought harsh ones; and found cause to be sorry afterwards for indulgences, with which at the time you were pleased: you must follow your maturer deliberate judgment, not your early rash one; treat your children as you would now be desirous to be treated, were you in their case, not as you did desire during your ignorance; and by no means think it a reason, for exposing them to ruin by dangerous pleasures and amusements, or for condemning them to insignificance by conniving at their idleness, that you were extremely glad to be thus used yourselves. But then, on the other hand, if you are convinced of this, you ought to consider, as impartially as you can, whether you do no carry it too far: whether your present severer notions be not the effect of prejudices, as natural to riper years, as the opposite ones are to youth: and however certain you are of the contrary, still do your best, to make what is needful for your children easy to them, by telling them the reasons of your proceeding when they can safely be told: and when they cannot, you must give such proofs on other occasions, of judicious tenderness towards them, as may gain their implicit confidence in the fitness of whatever you require; and must not be much offended, if, after all, the obedience, which you receive, be too like that which probably you paid, somewhat unwilling and imperfect. Another duty of parents, which the rule of the text cannot fail of recommending to them, is, making a due and timely provision for the decent subsistence of their children. Either this was done for you, or you strongly felt, that it ought to have been done for

you. Whichsoever was the case, you are inexcusable if, through extravagance or indolence, you neglect to do it for them: and you are equally so, (for the same plain reason) unless you endeavour with your utmost care and skill, to guard them against all sorts of danger, and secure to them all sorts of happiness, in the world, into which you have brought them.

But then, children should also think; (and, as they are extremely apt to forget it, should often call upon themselves to think), Were there any one, for whom I had the same anxiety and solicitude, that my parents appear to have for me; and who had the same obligations to me, that I have to my parents: should I be willing to have all my kindness received with contempt or indifference; to have that person prefer every fancy of his own to my comfort and peace? Should any one ever be put under my direction, shall I be content, that before he can possibly be capable of judging, he should insist on following his own judgment, and pay no deference to mine? Nay, supposing I had faults, many and great ones, would I in earnest be willing to lose all obedience and respect on account of them? Do I not already, notwithstanding all my faults, expect more regard than a little from those, that are younger than myself? Do I not see all parents expect it from their children? All superiors from their inferiors? And shall I not most certainly think hereafter, as they do? Why should not my actions therefore now be suitable to what my sentiments will be then?

A third relation in domestic life is that between masters and servants. Now is it not exceeding natural for each of the former to ask himself, Were I a

servant, as I might have been, should I hold it reasonable to be treated roughly and haughtily, to be blamed or suspected without cause, to have every fault aggravated and treasured up for ever, and little notice taken of my behaving ever so well; to have immoderate labour or attendance exacted, or what is fitting in any kind withheld, or what is due for my service detained from me; to be neglected in sickness or old age, to be exposed without redress to injuries from my fellow servants; to have no instruction in my duty given me, perhaps no opportunity afforded me of learning those great truths of religion, which are the best direction and support through this life, and the only means of being happy for ever in a better? If I should think, and justly think, myself entitled to receive the reverse of this usage, let me be sure to give it; and study to make that subjection, which cannot be a very pleasing state, as tolerable as can be to those, who are in it: for mine would be a very intolerable one, were there none such.

And surely, on the other hand, all servants, in whatever stations, ought to ask their hearts with equal fairness: Would it seem to me fit, were I a master, that my servant should be dishonest or undutiful, quarrelsome or disorderly, negligent or wasteful in my family, when I had covenanted with him for the contrary good qualities, and was bound to pay him a valuable consideration for them? Would I be willing he should betray my secrets, hurt my reputation, corrupt my children; or any way prove my enemy, when I had brought him under my roof to be my friend? Would I be content, he should quit me without reasonable notice; or bear nothing from me, who perhaps must bear much from him;

murmur at every inconvenience, and appear sensible of no advantages? If not; what I should require, that let me do.

But I proceed now to superiors, not in authority, but in rank only; on account of some one or more of the various pre-eminences, that raise men one above another. For these also, and their respective inferiors, have great need to form their conduct first, and try it ever after by this excellent rule.

They, who challenge reverence on account of their years, ought frequently to reflect, how ill they would digest, were they young, that assuming carriage, which they sometimes use; how unjust they would deem it to be treated penuriously and rigidly; to be condemned, and it may be cast off, for mere indiscretions, or even a few grosser faults. But then young people, in their turn, cannot consider too much, and very seldom consider nearly enough, how bitter it would be to them were they already in years, how bitter it will be to them, when that time comes, to have their experience and wisdom slighted, and be objects of dislike and ridicule to every raw and thoughtless creature, perhaps for those very things, which ought to procure them honour and love.

Again, persons of superior quality or wealth should bring themselves down in their imaginations to the middle and lower condition of life: consult their breasts, what degree of respect they would like to pay those above them; what sorts of condescension and subserviency they would think it hard to have exacted from them; what claims of privilege they would judge oppressive and injurious: and let the feelings, which they will thus acquire, and which perhaps will be new to them, regulate their conduct. They should examine well what the real state of the

industrious, the needy, the helpless part of the world often is; then place themselves in it a while; and they would have a strong sense, how criminal it must be in any way to increase their difficulties, how requisite in every way to lessen them. But, at the same time, meaner persons also have full as much occasion to consider, how grievous they would find it, were they in higher stations, to be defrauded and imposed on, how provoking to be complained of without cause, how irksome to be treated with unreasonable requests and expectations; and what a shocking thing it is for them to use such insolence towards their betters, as they would think insupportable, should even their betters use it towards them.

A third sort of pre-eminence without authority is that, which arises from personal accomplishments of mind or body. And here again the rule most clearly directs, those who excel, never to be contemptuous or ostentatious; and those who are deficient, never to give offence by unequal competitions, or marks of envy; for each would account them extremely injurious, were he in the other's place. But let us now go on to the

Second general head, the influence of this precept, where persons are equal, or, however, may be considered as such. And these are chiefly, either near relations, friends, and intimates, or such as have occasional intercourse, in business, in conversation, in matters of party dispute, civil or religious, in subjects of private offence and resentment, in cases that call for good-nature and compassion.

Near relations always claim peculiar affection and regard, but too seldom pay it. Negligence, ill-temper, emulation, mutual jealousy in point of interest or favour, alienate and sour their minds: and each

complains of the rest, because none will apply our Saviour's direction to search and reform himself. Intimacies, and what people call friendships, are on the same account perpetually liable to be broken off by disgusts, frequently very groundless ones; and while they last, are very commonly, either insincere and treacherous, or by wrong partialities and compliances, dangerous and pernicious: all which things the plain question, "Would it be right, that we "should be treated as we treat others," might easily prevent. But I proceed to those, who have only occasional intercourse.

In business, every one would think it hard, even to be obstructed and delayed, much more to be overreached or oppressed: whether by taking advantage of law against common justice, or of his necessity, his ignorance, his mistake, his inadvertence, his forgetfulness, or any other way. Every one would be willing to make a reasonable profit of his labour, his goods, or his skill; and unwilling to allow another more than is reasonable. Every one would expect from his creditor all due forbearance; and more than common forbearance, when circumstances required it. Every one would expect, that they should not become his debtors, who have no prospect of paying; and that they, who, if they will take proper measures for it, can pay, should do it within the time promised. Every one would claim to have proper notice taken of his interests and pretensions, as well as those of other people; nay indeed to have some regard, where there is room for it, paid to his bare inclinations: *Therefore all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them.* To use even those unfairly, who have used us so, is very bad: but to use any one unfairly, because

another hath used us so, is what, were we to suffer such usage, we should think monstrously wicked. You will say perhaps, We shall be undone, if we confine ourselves to act, as we may indeed reasonably wish, but shall wish to no manner of purpose, that others would act; and therefore we must do as they do, not as we would in vain have them do. But consider. Our blessed Saviour, you may be sure, foresaw this objection: and yet, doth he allow that, to secure ourselves, we should violate the integrity we owe to our fellow-creatures? No: but only bids us join discretion with it: *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves* *. It is very true, innocence without prudence will not do for this world: but prudence without innocence will not do for the next; nor always even for this; in which probably more men of abilities have ruined themselves by adventuring into crooked paths, than weak men have, by keeping to the straight one. But to proceed:

In common conversation, you certainly expect civility and decent complaisance; be careful to shew it then: you would not be overborne; be not overbearing: you would have what you say or do received with candour; receive in the same manner what the rest of the company say or do. You would be very unwilling to hear those, whom you respect, unhandsomely spoken of: therefore speak unhandsomely of no one, whom it is possible any other person may respect. And remember there are persons who respect religion and virtue; and feel as much uneasiness at profane or indecent discourse, as you can feel when your best friends are slandered. Again: you would desire, that when any thing is mentioned,

* Matt. x. 6.

which can affect your character, it should be placed in the most favourable light. Place therefore in the same whatever may affect the character of any one else. And even if you are not so tender about reputation; yet recollect, that the people, of whom you are discoursing, may: behave therefore as you would wish them to do, if you had the same sensibility, that they have. You are tempted perhaps to take liberties in talk, because you have a talent for satire and ridicule. But how would you wish others to exercise this talent with respect to you, if they had it, and you not? Should you deserve to be made odious or contemptible, merely because they had wit? But your motive, it may be, is of a higher kind. You have a zeal against wickedness and folly. Why, shew it then in promoting virtue and wisdom, and all will be well. But passing hasty censures, and spreading bad reports, possibly with little or no foundation, is a strange method of being zealous for what is good; and a most unrighteous one you would think, were the case your own. Or, supposing that the fault, about which you are so vehement, is but too certain: were you never guilty of any, were you never in danger of any? And would it have been well done to expose you for it to the utmost? Might it not have made you desperate, instead of reforming you? How much more rational, as well as humane, is the Apostle's injunction, *to speak evil of no man, but shew all meekness unto all men; for*, saith he, *we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived**. Our religion (and it is greatly to its honour) commands us to be strict in our own conduct, yet gentle in our remarks on that of others: and its professors are too often the reverse; loose in their principles and practices, bitter

* Tit. iii. 2, 3.

in their reflections. Yet still, such freedoms in discourse, when they are taken, not with design to do harm, but through mere inconsiderateness, ought not to be much resented; because most men must be conscious, that they are too apt to take the same: for which they would undoubtedly think it hard, not to be pardoned. And, above all, they who know that their behaviour hath given ground for censure, ought to bear it very patiently, as what they have deserved. For so they would judge others under the same circumstances ought to do, both in point of justice and of prudence.

Another occasion, on which dreadful injuries, both in word and deed, are sadly frequent, is that of disputes and contentions, religious and civil. For the mildness and love, which both our common nature and common Christianity dictate, is not only transgressed in these cases by many without perceiving it, but some imagine the utmost vehemence a duty; and defend it, by saying directly, that were it possible for them to be as bad as their adversaries are, they should think no usage too severe. But must you not think it too severe, to have it taken for granted you were thus bad; to have every random assertion to your disadvantage immediately believed; and a share of every ill thing, that any one of the same denomination had done, imputed to you: to have men work up their own passions against you to any height without reason, or follow the common cry of their side, or the fashionable one of the times, without consideration? Surely you ought to consider well, how you should like to have the sect or party, the profession or body of men, that you were of, pointed out to be run down thus, right or wrong. And in general it ought to be considered well, by

those who have power, what forbearance and moderation they should claim, were others in power; by those who are weakest, what freedoms they would account unfit to be taken with them, if they were the strongest; and by all persons, what they would reckon allowable and fair in their opposers, what on the contrary dishonourable and criminal.

But I go on from these more public altercations to that with which they are so closely connected, matters of private displeasure and offence. You make no scruple perhaps of doing what must naturally disoblige and provoke others; but without regard to that, pursue your own interest, or indulge your own humour. Now would you indeed be well pleased, that the rest of the world should be as regardless of your inclination or convenience? You apprehend yourself injured, and resolve instantly on revenge, to the extent of your ability. But could you possibly think it right, that the anger of another (and your own is just as blind) should be left without control to determine, whether and how far you have done wrong, and what return it deserved: that he should be judge and executioner in his own cause, and perhaps not take a moment to cool first? You feel, by having received an injury, how very bad a thing it is to do one. Recollect then: returning one is doing one; is doing it designedly too, with that single mischievous intention: whereas in all likelihood the person, at whom you are so exasperated, meant much more to serve or gratify himself, than to hurt you, if he meant the latter at all. Or whatever his intentions were, you have both a precept of Scripture to direct you on the occasion, and a promise of Scripture to indemnify you: *Say not, I will do to him, as he hath done to me; I will render to the man accord-*

*ing to his work**. *Say not, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee* †. If then you take the opposite course, you reject what God hath expressly appointed to be your rule; you choose, instead of it, what he hath expressly forbidden to be your rule; you put yourself from under the protection of his providence, and knowingly expose yourself to his heaviest displeasure. But, you will say, If we may not revenge ourselves, we may surely resolve to have nothing more to do with the man who hath injured us; and look on all obligations of kindness to him as cancelled. Now here again consider: would it be reasonable, if you had once, or more than once, behaved to any one as you ought not, that therefore you should be rejected for ever? Might not you regain in time a title even to friendship and confidence? Might not you from the first be a fit object of lower marks of favour? Or supposing you did not deserve them, might it not be very laudable and right to treat you better, than you deserved? Do not you hope to be treated thus, on many occasions by men, and in the important concern of your future happiness by God himself? whose mercy you dare ask for no other terms, than those of being forgiven, as you forgive. If therefore the forgiveness, which you beg, includes bounty and gracious notice; let that, which you grant, do so likewise, in a proper degree; and imitate the goodness, which otherwise you will pray for in vain. Observe but in what manner our Saviour hath in St. Luke connected the precept before us, with that of pardoning injuries: *As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise—Love your enemies, and do good, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he*

* Prov. xxiv. 29. † Prov. xx. 22.

is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful †. But at least, you will say, proper submission may be required first. Why undoubtedly it may. And he, who hath done the wrong, should always consider, whether, if he had received it, the satisfaction which he deems it beneath him to give, would not have appeared very necessary for him to claim. But then at the same time, you, who have received the wrong, should consider too, whether if you had done it, you could have yielded to the rigorous terms and debasing compliances which you exact: nay, would not have thought it very hard, that such as might be in strictness due, should be without abatement insisted on.

Another situation, requisite to be mentioned, in which we are strangely apt to violate our Saviour's rule, is, when connexions or circumstances call us to show courtesy, love, or pity. Very commonly we have scarce any attention to return the obliging behaviour, which we absolutely expect: give mighty small proofs of affection, even where we should be miserable, if the greatest were not given us; and hardly express the least compassion to the afflicted, whereas we should look for all possible assiduity of tenderness, were we in their condition. Or if even our strength of mind were such as not to need support; we ought surely to ask ourselves, what we should justly wish for, had we less strength, as others may. But instead of being moved by that consideration to a friendly sympathy, we can persecute the wretched with unreasonable harsh maxims of impracticable wisdom; nay, perhaps imbitter their sorrows with groundless or immoderate reproaches, when the

† Luke vi. 31. 35, 36.

justest and the gentlest reproofs would be ill-timed and hard-hearted. What feelings the persons thus treated must have, and consequently what our own under the same treatment would be, is incomparably set forth in those words of Job: *I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words, and shake my head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth; and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief**. This therefore is our duty: for this would assuredly be our desire. But then, as they, who are not in affliction, should think, if they were, with what kindness they should expect to be attended and regarded: so they, who are, should think in return, if it had fallen to their lot to pay this attendance and regard, what patience and reasonableness they should have expected from those, to whom they paid it; and what thankful acknowledgments, for discharging an office but tolerably well, which must be in itself a melancholy and unpleasing one.

These are some, and I hope the more usual, of the numberless cases, in which we should all be solicitously careful to *do to others, as we would they should do to us.* Indeed were we to aim at taking one step further, and a little exceed the goodness, which we conceive we might equitably demand, we should seldom go beyond the rule, but only make somewhat surer not to fall short of it: a point of which it concerns us in the highest degree to make sure. For when God is so gracious, as to appeal to our hearts, and govern us by a law, as it were of our own enacting (a law which we cannot be ignorant of, cannot except against, and one should think can hardly forget or misapply); we must be dreadfully inexcusable

* Job xvi. 4, 5.

before him, when we disobey it. Indeed the general disobedience to it which there is in the world, affords us a deplorable view of the state of mankind; and should excite us to a strict examination of our past, and a diligent watchfulness over our future conduct. We have all transgressed even this most obvious and unexceptionable rule: let us all beg that pardon, which our Saviour hath merited, for what we have done ill; and apply for that grace of the Holy Spirit, without the help of which we can do nothing well.

SERMON XIV.

GEN. ii. 3.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.

THESE words contain the account of that original appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion, from which all subsequent appointments of the same nature have been derived. And therefore I shall take occasion from them to shew, God willing, in three discourses,

I. On what authority the observation of a weekly day of public devotion and rest is founded.

II. In what manner that day ought to be spent.

I. On what authority it is founded.

It is not only our duty to address God in private prayer, but also to assemble ourselves together in order to offer up to him our united devotions. As we are by nature formed for society, we ought to be social in religion as well as in other instances. As we are all dependant for every thing we have or hope for on the same Almighty Being, the Creator and Governor of the universe, we ought all to join in openly acknowledging that dependance, in begging with one voice the supply of our common wants, the forgiveness of our common offences, the removal of our common calamities; and in returning thanks for the various mercies which we have in common re-

ceived from our heavenly Benefactor. But besides this, public worship is of all other things the best calculated both to cherish in ourselves, and by the powerful force of sympathy and example to excite in others, the warmest sentiments of piety and virtue. Indeed without it (as both reason and experience prove) mankind would gradually lose all sense of religion; and without that the lower part of them would quickly sink into the grossest depravity of mind, and profligacy of manners.

Joining in family devotions might indeed in some degree guard against these mischiefs and answer the other good ends above mentioned: and large families may be considered almost in the same light with small parishes. But family devotions are shamefully neglected: and were they universally kept up, they could seldom be expected to convey so much knowledge, and would scarce ever produce in the mind so strong a feeling that whole neighbourhoods and nations are members of one body, as the offices performed in more numerous assemblies do.

Since therefore on these accounts there must be public worship and instruction: it is not only useful, but necessary, that there should be also fixed times, appointed for it by sufficient authority: for were it left at large to be performed at any time, there is but too much reason to fear that it would be frequently delayed, or neglected, and at last perhaps wholly thrown aside. But how much and what time should be devoted to this employment, if God hath given no intimation of his will, every society must have determined for themselves: and in all likelihood would have determined very differently. For the imagined mysteries and excellencies of the number seven would probably have been no more regarded,

than those of other numbers, which have as good a claim: at least they would never have influenced even the speculative part, much less the bulk of mankind, to any such purpose as this. And even supposing they could have known farther, (which without revelation they could not) that God had ceased on the seventh day from his work of creation, that alone had been no evidence, that man ought to cease every seventh day from his ordinary labour, and spend it in religious exercises. A divine direction therefore must be extremely serviceable: both to prevent all doubts how much time would be enough; and to secure a general agreement in the particular time. For if several sorts of persons observed perhaps all the several days of the week, this diversity, were it to obtain only in different nations, would be inconvenient; but in the same, would obstruct business to a degree almost insupportable.

Now such a direction from above seems to have been vouchsafed in the very beginning of the world. For when we read in the text, and the verse preceding it, that *on the seventh day God ended his work, and* therefore *blessed the day and sanctified it;* that is, assigned to it the honourable distinction of preserving the memory of his having created all things: the obvious interpretation is, that this appointment took place from the time that the reason for it took place, from the time at which it is introduced in the sacred history; and not from that of the Jewish deliverance from Egypt, two thousand five hundred years after. For it is quite improbable, that Moses would both mention the institution of the sabbath so very long before he needed, and mention it in terms, that naturally imply its being instituted at the creation, if it was not. Nor is the contrary opinion of some an-

cient fathers of any weight in this case; and much less that of modern rabbins. For neither of them had better opportunities of knowing the truth, than we have now. And both of them had prejudices to bias their judgment. The former, in disputing against the Jews of that time, were tempted to defend their own practice of not observing the Jewish sabbath, by alleging, that the patriarchs before the law did not observe it. Yet some of them appear to have been of a different opinion *. As to the rabbins, (though Philo the Jew †, far ancienter than any of them, and some of their own number ‡, thought the observance of the sabbath as old as the world, yet in general) they magnified themselves in after ages, by pretending that this excellent ordinance was first established in the Hebrew nation. And it is very true, we find no instance of keeping the sabbath before the days of Moses. But then, on the other hand, we find not even the name of the sabbath for almost five hundred years after Moses, that is till David's reign; and then only once §; and but once again ‖ for above one hundred years more. Yet no one doubts of its being appointed, and in the main observed through that time: and therefore why not in the preceding times also; since there is the same reason to be given for omitting the mention of it in both cases; that the history is short, and comprehends no particulars, that made speaking of it necessary?

But still, between the creation and Moses, we find

* Novatian de Cibis Judaicis, c. 3. saith, Decem Sermones illi in Tabulis nihil novum docent, sed quod obliteratum fuerat admonent.

† De vit. Mos. l. 3. p. 175.

‡ Seld. de In. et G. l. 3. c. 13.

§ 1 Chron. xxiii. 31.

‖ 2 Kings iv. 23.

not only seven-fold vengeance threatened in the case of Cain *, and Noah taking seven pairs of every clean beast into the ark †, and Jacob bowing before Esau seven times ‡, but both years § and days ‖ counted by sevens; and a very particular notice taken of the interval of seven days in the history of the deluge ¶. Nay, we find the very name of weeks used **: which could not well have any other original, than from the institution of keeping the seventh day holy. For there is no obvious foundation in nature for dividing time into weeks, as there is into months and years from the course of the sun and moon: nor any manner of probability, than in those early ages the period of seven days was introduced from regard to the seven planets; a number which doth not appear to have been known then. For the patriarch Joseph reckons eleven principal stars ††; and seven are not once named throughout the Old Testament. Indeed the prophet Amos in our translation speaks of the seven stars ‡‡; but the Hebrew word expresses no number, and certainly doth not mean the planets, and what it doth mean is doubtful; and besides, Amos lived seven hundred years after Moses. Now supposing the appointment of observing this day to be made at the creation, it would bind all men, to whose knowledge it came, till it was either in form repealed, or tacitly superseded by substituting another in its room. Accordingly we find Job, who is plainly not represented as a Jew, and is by many thought as early as Moses, offering sacrifices constantly at

* Gen. iv. 15.
† Gen. vii. 2, 3.
‡ Gen. xxxiii. 3.
§ Gen. xxix. 18. 27. xli. 27. 29.
‖ Gen. l. 10.
¶ Gen. vii. 4. 10. viii. 10. 12.
** Gen. xxix. 27, 28.
†† Gen. xxxvii. 9.
‡‡ Amos v. 8.

the end of every seven days *. And perhaps the seventh was that day, on which the sons of God (who, we read, sang together and shouted for joy at the foundation of the earth †) are said in his history to present themselves before the Lord ‡. For it seems plainly to have been a stated day, and we know of no other. Farther still, we find Balaam appointing seven altars to be built, and offering on them seven bullocks and seven rams §, three times over: which looks like a memorial of the original seventh day. Very probably indeed the generality of mankind in process of time forgot the celebration of the sabbath, as they did the rest of their duty: yet not so entirely, but that a few scattered and obscure footsteps of this, as well as other articles of the primitive religion, remained long afterwards amongst the Heathen. For though a considerable part of the notice, which they took of the seventh day, and the period of seven days, might proceed from other causes, one cannot so well think the whole did, as it began so early, and extended so wide ‖.

Possibly the Jews too had in a great measure lost the remembrance of the institution, during their bondage in Egypt at least: where indeed their attempting to observe it, by not working upon it, would only have exposed them to a larger share of ill treatment: on which account Providence might rather permit it to fall for a time into oblivion. Yet when God is said, in Nehemiah, to have made *known*

* Job i. 2. 4, 5. † Job xxxviii. 7.
‡ Job i. 6. ii. 1. § Numb. xxiii. 1. 14. 29.

‖ Yet the seventh day, regarded by many of the Heathen, and which Philo mentions as being so universally regarded by them, was the seventh day of the month. Vid. Carpzovii Philoniana. The observation of the seventh day of the week perhaps degenerated into this.

to them his holy sabbath by the hand of Moses *, this doth not, according to the use of like phrases elsewhere, prove, that they were totally ignorant of it before: much less, that their forefathers were. And when Moses in Exodus, before the delivery of the law, tells them, *to-morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord* †, it appears both from the words themselves, and the time of speaking them, that they are an admonition concerning the revival of an intermitted observance, not an institution of a new one. For why should a commandment be first given in this manner separately then, which was in a month after to be promulgated with so much greater solemnity among the rest of the ten, upon mount Sinai? But if on the contrary it was from the beginning, it might be very proper to remind the people of that, before they heard it joined with the rest by the mouth of God himself. And indeed the other nine being as old as the creation, and obligatory on all men, it seems extremely probable from thence alone, that this, the fourth in number, was so too.

However, the nature of the appointment is more explicitly set forth in Exodus, than in Genesis. Not only sanctification of the day in general, but rest in particular is enjoined; and the injunction is extended not only to servants, but the very cattle. Several reasons for it are also there assigned. The first is the original one, because *God rested on the seventh day:* that is, he ceased from his work, it being accomplished. For *the Creator of the ends of the earth,* as the prophet Isaiah justly teaches, *fainteth not, neither is weary* ‡. And as worshipping no other deity, than the Maker of all things, was the great article, that distinguished the religion of the Jews from the pagan;

* Neh. ix. 14. † Exod. xvi. 23. ‡ Isa. xl. 28.

and as the sabbath was a principal instrument of preserving and exercising this worship: it is therefore said to be a *sign between God and them, throughout their generations* *. A second use of the sabbath was, to be a memorial, in future times, of the happy exchange, which they had just then made, of a state of servitude and labour for one of liberty and ease. *Remember, that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm: therefore he commanded thee to keep the sabbath day* †. And it hath been thought by some learned men, that the time of keeping it was then changed in such manner, as that the primitive and patriarchal sabbath was restored, when afterwards that day, on which our Lord rose again, was appointed to be observed ‡. But without examining into this, I proceed to the third motive, assigned for the appointment of the sabbath, which was mercy and humanity: *that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid and the stranger may be refreshed* §. And because that perverse nation would otherwise have been likely, both to explain away general rules to almost nothing, and indeed to slight all rules: therefore to the prohibition in the commandment,

* Exod. xxxi. 13. † Deut. v. 15.

‡ Wellius, Act. Er. 1745, p. 694, thinks, that the seventh day of the creation being the first full day of Adam's life, it would be not only his sabbath, but the first of his week; and that being afterwards turned to the worship of the sun, God gave the Jews the seventh of the week instead of it, but that Christ restored it. But Vignoles saith the beginning of the year was not changed at the exodus: and that the day of it was Thursday. Others think, that the sixth day of the patriarchal forgotten week, being that of the Jewish exodus, was made their seventh and sabbath: whence the patriarchal seventh would be their and our first.

§ Exod. xxiii. 12.

particular ones of such and such work were added, in other parts of the law *; and the whole was inforced by the penalty of death †: whereas people of better dispositions might have been trusted farther, and punished less rigorously.

On this footing things remained, till Christianity appeared: which being in itself a complete instruction and rule of human duty, no precepts given to mankind before, under less perfect dispensations, continue any farther obligatory, than they are either plainly confirmed by it, or in their own nature moral and unchangeable. This not only the reason of the thing shews, but St. Paul hath fully and repeatedly declared it ‡: and especially concerning the observation of the seventh day of the week (which was the Jewish sabbath) by name, in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Colossians: where having first laid it down, that *Christ hath blotted out the hand-writing of* the former *ordinances*, he infers: *let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days* §; which words are comprehensive enough to repeal the patriarchal sabbath-day, as well as the Jewish, (which however was doubtless chiefly intended,) if indeed the former was different from that, which Christians

* Of ploughing and harvest-work, Exod. xxxiv. 21, of kindling fires, Exod. xxxv. 3. Indeed this last seems almost in effect prohibited before the law, Exod. xvi. 23. Nor might they buy or sell. Neh. xiii. 16.

† Exod. xxxi. 14.

‡ According to the Cambridge MS. of the Gospels, our Saviour had declared it, in this point, before him. For at the end of Luke vi. 5. it hath these words, both in the Greek and Latin: "the same day, seeing a certain man working on the sabbath, he said to him; Man, if thou knowest what thou dost, thou art blessed: but if thou knowest not, thou art cursed, and a transgressor of the law."

§ Col. ii. 14. 16. Concerning this text, see Mede, Disc. 15. p. 57.

now observe. Again, the same Apostle, blaming the Galations for *desiring to be still under bondage to the weak and poor elements* of the old dispensation, saith: *Ye observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid, lest I have bestowed on you labour in vain* *. This passage, in its full latitude, (which there appears no necessity of restraining,) implies, that all preceding appointments of this kind were under Christianity null and void.

Still we read in the history of our Saviour's sufferings, that the women, which had followed him, *returned* after *beholding his sepulchre, and rested the sabbath-day*, that is, the seventh day of the week, *according to the commandment* †. But this by no means proves, that resting on the Saturday was to continue as much a duty after his death, as before: though doubtless it was a duty as yet, with respect to them, and probably the rest of his disciples too; because the abolition of it was not as yet made known to them. Nor indeed would it have been allowable for them, if they had known it, to offend the Jews, at so critical a time, by a seeming transgression in so favourite an article. It must be owned also, that our blessed Redeemer directs his followers, when the approaching troubles of Judea should come on, to *pray that their flight* from them *might not be in the winter, neither on the sabbath-day* ‡. But he did not mean, that it would be unlawful to fly on the latter, more than in the former; but inconvenient only, which it certainly would: because the Jews, who had sought to kill him for doing miracles on that day, would assuredly, when his disciples travelled upon it, though for the preservation of their lives, afford them no accommodations; but impute, and, if they could,

* Gal. iv. 9, 10, 11. † Luke xxiii. 55, 56. ‡ Matt. xxiv. 20.

punish it as a crime. It must be owned lastly, that the Apostles frequented the synagogues on the Sabbath, that is the Saturday: but only with a view of converting the Jews to Christianity, not at all of conforming themselves to Judaism, otherwise than by way of prudent condescension. From the same motive, and from a spirit of abundant piety, no small part of the primitive Christians also continued for some ages paying honour to the Jewish sabbath; yet declared expressly all the while, that they looked on the obligation of it as totally expired with the rest of the law: on which account, though they held religious assemblies on that day, yet they worked on it too.

But though the positive and ceremonial part of the Mosaic law is abolished, yet the moral and natural precepts remain in full force. And the ten commandments being delivered in a manner so peculiar to themselves, and having such peculiar notice taken of them both in the Old Testament and the New, have been always deemed in the church of Christ a summary of moral duties. Accordingly, our church hath placed them as such, both in the Catechism and Communion service; the latter of which directs us, after the recital of the fourth, as well as the rest, to say, *Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.* But some will ask, if we are bound to keep it, why are we not bound to keep the day specified in it, the last of the week? The answer is, that two things are to be considered: the general intention of the commandment, and the particular means, by which it appoints that intention to be executed. So far as its general intention goes, which is to set apart from worldly business a competent portion of time for religious uses, it was ever discoverable by

reason and binding to all men. So far as it appoints this portion to be one day in seven, it was always binding where it could be known; and directs only to what the Christian church hath constantly observed, and prays with much reason to observe it rightly. Now many learned men have conceived it to direct nothing farther: apprehending, that the obligation, which the Jews were under to keep the day which they do, did not arise from the words of the fourth commandment (for that, they think, would be equally obeyed by keeping statedly any one day of the seven); but proceeded from God's determination, made in the wilderness, which one day theirs should be, by causing a double quantity of manna to fall on the preceding, and none on that. If this be so, we observe the whole of the commandment as literally as they. But if it prescribes, not only some one day in each week, but particularly the last day: then the prayer, that God would *incline our hearts to keep it*, must be understood with this limitation, so far as we are concerned in it; that is, so far as it relates to one day in seven, not to the last day of the week: which limitation the composers of the prayer must certainly have designed; for it is notorious, that none of them thought Saturday was to be kept holy. And indeed the ten commandments have other things in them, peculiar to the Jews, as well as this. Such is the description, *that brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage:* and the promise, *that thy days may be long in the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* Now we are not concerned at all in the peculiarities, even of this part of the Mosaic dispensation: but, to speak in the words of one of our Homilies *, *Whatever is found in the fourth com-*

* Of the time and place of prayer.

mandment, appertaining to the law of nature, ought to be retained of Christians. Now the law of nature enjoins only a due and convenient proportion of time to be kept holy. And supposing that proportion to be one day of rest, after six of labour, in memory of the creation: we comply with it equally; whether we pitch on the first, or the last, day of the week for that rest.

But there is one great advantage in choosing the former, on which the Author of our salvation rested from the labours of his state of humiliation, after accomplishing the great work he had undertaken: that thus we very fitly join the thankful memorial of the new creation (for so is our redemption called in Scripture *), with that of the old. Nor doth our observation of the day stand, by any means, on this propriety alone: but on such other plain and strong authorities, as I shall now proceed to set before you.

Every single Evangelist begins his account of our Saviour's resurrection with observing, that it was *on the first day of the week.* Now it had been perfectly needless for any one of them to have done this, and very unlikely that all of them should, had the day been intended for no particular use. But evidently it was: and for what use, appears immediately. For on that very same day we find the Apostles assembled, and Jesus in the midst of them, instructing them with his own mouth †. The first day of the very next week we find them assembled again, and our Lord again with them ‡. Six weeks after, at Pentecost, is recorded in the Acts, a third instance of *all* the Apostles at least, being *with one accord,* on that day, *in one place,* where *they were filled with the Holy*

* 2 Cor. v. 17. Eph. ii. 10. iv. 24.

† John xx. 19.

‡ John xx. 26.

Ghost *. Farther yet, the same book informs us, that *on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread,* to receive the holy sacrament, *Paul preached to them* †. And that great Apostle himself directs the Corinthians, that, *on the first day of the week,* every one should lay by, according to his ability, something for the poor ‡: which example of piety succeeding ages imitated, by charitable contributions in their weekly assemblies. Now if any person can possibly imagine, that this day was so frequently specified in this manner by mere accident, let him only reflect, that throughout the whole history of the first Christians in the New Testament, no other day is ever specified, as any way peculiarly regarded by them.

But farther still, St. John, in the Revelation, calls it the Lord's day. *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day* §. For that he means by that phrase what we do now, is clear from hence, that St. Ignatius, exhorting to the due observation of this day, within a few years after him, used it in that sense ‖; as did the whole body of subsequent fathers, councils, laws, and histories: and no one, so far as appears, ever used it in any other. This day then hath the same mark in St. John, that the blessed sacrament hath in St. Paul, of being appropriated to the honour of our Saviour. The former is called the Lord's day, just as the latter is the Lord's Supper. And accordingly the Epistle of St. Barnabas, written perhaps before the Revelation, saith, *We observe with gladness the eighth day, on which Jesus rose from the dead* ¶: confessedly meaning by the eighth, the next after the seventh, in our common language the first. Nor is there a single

* Acts ii. 1. 4. † Acts xx. 7. ‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.
§ Rev. i. 10. ‖ Ign. ad Magnes. § 8. ¶ Ep. Barnab. § 15.

instance, from the earliest times downwards for one thousand five hundred years, of any church or sect of believers whatever, that did not profess keeping it holy to Him. For what St. Paul saith, that *one man esteemed one day above another, and another esteemed every day alike* *, plainly relates to the keeping of the Jewish festivals, which was greatly controverted at that time, not of this Christian festival, about which there was no controversy at all.

Now such universal consent, without exception, amongst persons who differed so widely about multitudes of other matters, could not but proceed from some original injunction, either of our Lord or his Apostles. No authority besides theirs was early or extensive enough to be a ground of the practice: and we cannot well think it was taken up without any authority, for this reason besides others, that if it had, some ancient council would undoubtedly have placed it on a surer foundation. But no council ever pretended to establish the observance of this day: which, far from lowering its obligation, heightens it very much; by showing, that the rulers of the church all along knew it to have been established from the beginning by a superior power †. And therefore they contented themselves to enforce the regard due to it, and determine particular doubts concerning it, from time to time. The New Testament indeed doth not say, that our Saviour appointed it. But St. Luke saith in the Acts, that after his resurrection he conversed with the Apostles forty days, *speaking* to them *of things pertaining to the kingdom of God*‡: that is,

* Rom. xiv. 5.

† Quod universa tenet ecclesia, nec conciliis institutum, sed semper retentum est, non nisi auctoritate apostolica traditum rectissime creditur. Aug. de Bapt. contra Donatistas, l. 4. c. 23.

‡ Acts i. 3.

the Gospel dispensation. And St. Clement, the Roman, whom St. Paul to the Philippians calls *his fellow-labourer, whose name is in the book of life* *, saith further, *We ought to do all things in order, which the Lord hath commanded: to perform our offices and services according to the appointed seasons. And he hath commanded them to be done, not at random and disorderly, but at determinate seasons and times* †. Now what seasons can he so probably mean, as the returns of that day, which bears our Lord's name: and which later fathers expressly affirm was kept by his command ‡? But without any such evidence; as in the case of the patriarchs before Moses, and of the Jews for many ages after him, though we read nothing in Scripture of the *observance* of the *sabbath*, yet we presume it from the institution: so here, in the case of the first Christians, though we read nothing in Scripture of the *institution* of the *Lord's day*, we may presume it from the observance: just as we do in the common law of our own country; in which multitudes of things are proved to be obligatory, not by producing the original appointment of them, for it is not extant; but by showing such immemorial usage, as must have proceeded from an appointment formerly made by the sovereign power.

Or supposing that it was not our Saviour in person, but the Apostles, who instituted the Lord's day (as indeed those Christian writers, which have spoken of it in the lowest terms, have acknowledged, that it began to be observed not only with their approbation,

* Phil. iv. 3. † Clem. Rom. Ep. i. § 40.

‡ Euseb. de Laud. Const. p. 733. Ed. Reading. Epiphan. Hom. de Resur. vol. 2. p. 277. saith, Christ blessed and sanctified the day of his resurrection, referring to God's blessing the sabbath. Aust. de Civ. Dei, l. 22. c. 30. Ep. 119. c. 13. Athan. de Sabbato.

but by their authority *): this will come very nearly to the same thing. For the Apostles were such, as could say, *It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us* †. Nor could they design it for a temporary institution, since the reasons of it are so evidently perpetual. But even suppose it had only been taken up with the joint consent of the Christian church: yet St. Paul would have thought it a sufficient answer to all, who should have pleaded for treating it with disrespect, that if *any man be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God* ‡. Suppose it had been enjoined only by the *governors* of the church, yet the direction of Scripture is, *Obey them, that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls* §. Suppose our *temporal* governors had required us to reverence it, as they have most strictly; here again, the direction of Scripture is, *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake: for they are God's ministers* ||. And as we confess ourselves bound by their command to keep occasional fasts and thanksgivings, on account of our worldly concerns, why not a stated thanksgiving for blessings infinitely superior? But even were the observation of the day to stand solely on the footing of its own reasonableness and propriety, yet this is the proportion of time, which the wisdom of God fixed on for his servants under the Old Testament: and since we owe him much more than they did, why should we pay him less, of any token of pious gratitude? If the sabbath was *a sign between God and them* ¶; so is the Lord's day a very expressive one between Christ and us: and why should not we declare, by this mark among

* Heylin, p. 32. † Acts xv. 28. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 16.
§ Heb. xiii. 17. || Rom. xiii. 1. 5, 6. ¶ Exod. xxxi. 13. 17.

the rest, whose we are? Nay lastly, were it grounded merely on its usefulness to mankind; still, a writer, who was never suspected of prejudice in favour of religion, Mr. Hobbes, acknowledges that, though the common opinion of Christians concerning this day were an error; yet it would be a happy one, and the contrary truth ought not to be published *. And another author since, of the same stamp, hath confessed it to be the most useful of the seven †: as indeed I hope hereafter to shew you it is, by much better proofs, than such testimonies. If then any one of these reasons for keeping it ought singly to be of such weight; only think, how forcible the influence of them all united should be; how complicated the guilt of disregarding them all is, and how dreadful an opening it must give to the disregard of every tye, that we can be under! Think, I say, of these things, and you will see abundant cause, both from religious and worldly considerations, to hold it in honour, and apply it to the Psalmist's words, which some have apprehended were spoken with a prophetic view to its future institution: *This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it* ‡.

* Hobbes against Bramhal, in Morer on the Lord's Day, p. 238.

† Mandeville, Essay on Charity Schools, towards the end.

‡ Ps. cxviii. 24.

SERMON XV.

GEN. ii. 3.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.

In my former discourse I shewed you on what authority the appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion stands. Let us now therefore proceed to consider,

II. In what manner that day ought to be spent. And

1. A due portion of it ought to be employed in public attendance on the worship of God, and religious instruction.

This, it must be owned, is not explicitly mentioned, either in the text, or in the fourth commandment; but only comprehended under the general phrase of *sanctifying* or hallowing the sabbath: whereas the point of rest is particularly specified. And without question, abstaining from labour, in memory of God's completing the creation of the heavens and earth (which some of the heathens held to proceed from blind fate or chance, whilst others worshipped the principal parts of them as deities), was of itself, without any thing more, *sanctifying*, that is, devoutly distinguishing the day, by a practical declaration upon it of the fundamental article

of true religion, that an infinitely wise and just and good Being is the Maker and Lord of all things. And enjoining the Jews afterwards on the same day to commemorate their miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and allow refreshment, during the whole of it, not only to their servants, but their cattle, must greatly promote amongst them, both thankful piety, and tenderness of heart. But still we cannot well imagine, that they were left at liberty to throw away all this leisure just as they pleased; when the very reason of appointing it led them so naturally to employ it well; and when, if they did not, many of them would of course employ it very ill.

Besides, the law of Moses directed, that the seventh day should be a *holy convocation* or assembly, as well as a sabbath of rest *: and allotted to the priests and Levites forty-eight cities in different parts of the land †: from whence they might with more convenience go to perform religious offices in every quarter; particularly that of instructing the people, which Moses expressly assigns to their whole tribe: *They shall teach Jacob thy judgments and Israel thy law* ‡. Accordingly Philo § and Josephus ‖, who both lived in the same age with our Saviour, say,

* Lev. xxiii. Com. Numb. x. 2. Isa. iv. 5.

† Numb. xxxv. 1—8. Josh. xxi. 1—8. ‡ Deut. xxxiii. 10.

§ De Septenario p. 282. See also de Vit. Mos. l. 3. p. 167. where he saith the Jews were to spend the sabbath εν ιλαριναις ευθυμιαις —χολαζοντας ουχ, ως ενιοι, γελωσιν, η παιδιαις, η μιμων η ορχηστων επιδειξεσι, —αλλα μονῳ τῳ φιλοσόφειν—Τα γαρ κατα πολεις προσευκτηρια τι ἑτερον εστιν, η διδασκαλεια φρονησεως και ανδριας και σωφροσυνης και δικαιοσυνης, ευσεβειας τε και ὁσιοτητος και συμπασης αρετης. See also de Dec. Orac. p. 197. et de Mundi Opificio, p. 30. et Lib. Quis Rerum, &c. p. 497. Τεταρτος δε περι της αει παρθενου και αμητορος εβδομαδος, ἱνα την απραξιαν αυτης μελετωσα γενεσις, εις μνημην του αορατως παντα δρωντος ερχηται.

‖ Contr. Ap. l. 2. § 17.

their lawgiver appointed his law to be read and expounded in public assemblies, for the improvement of the hearers, every seventh day; which is very consistent with the more solemn reading of it, appointed by him every seventh year, at the general meeting of the whole people *. And St. James also saith, *Moses of old time hath, in every city, them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day* †. Still it must be confessed, that this practice is no where in the Old Testament expressly either prescribed, or said to be observed: and therefore we may doubt, whether it became constant and universal very early. However we find there, that good persons usually resorted to the prophets (doubtless for instruction) on the sabbath day ‡. We find a complaint that the enemies of the Jews *had burnt up all the synagogues of God in the land* §: which, by this expression, must have been pretty numerous. We find a promise, that *upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, there shall be a glory and a defence* ||. We find the Levites mentioned, more than once, as those who *taught the good knowledge of the Lord to all Israel* ¶. When they had been *for a long season without a teaching priest, and without the law,* it is represented as a dreadful instance of national misery **. And when better times are foretold in another book, part of the description is, that *from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, all flesh should come to worship before God* ††.

On the return from the captivity, this prediction was verified. And so good were the effects of the

* Deut. xxxi. 10. 13. † Acts xvi. 21. ‡ 2 Kings iv. 23.
§ Psalm lxxiv. 8. || Is. iv. 5. ¶ 2 Chr. xxx. 22. xxxv. 3.
** 2 Chr. xv. 3. †† Isaiah lxvi. 23.

stated public worship and teaching, which thenceforward obtained more generally than before, that even had it first begun then, it had deserved to continue through all future ages. For idolatry, which nothing had hitherto been able to overcome, was entirely abolished by it: the nation grew more virtuous, as well as pious; and enjoyed more tranquillity, than in any preceding time. Sojourners in Judea, and inhabitants of other countries, into which they were dispersed, attending their synagogues, as we find in the New Testament they did, partook of a blessing, which the wisest of their lawgivers and philosophers had not provided for them: and multitudes of the heathen were converted to the one true God. Indeed about the time of our Saviour's appearance (as every thing good is apt to degenerate amongst men), this excellent institution was become an instrument of some superstition and uncharitableness, as well as much good. But that only increased the necessity of using it under due regulations; that it might cure, by its proper influence, those evils which it had caused by accidental abuse. And therefore He first reformed it, then by his Apostles established it throughout the world; and provided for its being carried on to all ages: and ever since, the principal season for instructing mankind hath been this day.

On this day, from the very birth of Christianity, as we read in the Acts, *the disciples came together to break bread* *: that is, to receive the Lord's Supper. With their breaking of bread, we read also, they joined *the Apostle's doctrine and prayer* †. Nor was this an act of mere voluntary piety, but a duty strictly binding. For they were commanded *not to forsake*

* Acts xx. 7. † Acts ii. 42.

the assembling themselves together *, when the utmost dangers attended the practice. For the service of these assemblies peculiarly, the Christian ministry was instituted: in these the Christian sacraments were celebrated: good Christians were to be admitted into them, bad ones excluded from them. Indeed the whole New Testament considers the followers of Christ, not as single unconnected believers, but as churches or societies, meeting together for the honour of God, and their mutual edification. And this they did so constantly, even in the days of the bitterest persecution, that Pliny, a heathen magistrate, writing, within a few years after the death of St. John, to the emperor Trajan, for directions how to proceed in punishing them, describes them by their custom of holding congregations on a stated day to worship Christ, and bind themselves by a sacrament, or oath, to commit no wickedness †. Again, about forty years after him, Justin Martyr, in a defence of them, when persecuted by another heathen emperor, gives the following account of their observation of Sunday. For though that name was undoubtedly superstitious in its origin, as Monday and all the rest are, yet the early Christians used it without scruple ‡, both because they were not understood by it to have a superstitious meaning, and because they could allege a better ground for it, than the idolators (which accordingly some ancient fathers did §,) that then Christ, *the Sun of Righteousness, rose* ‖ from the grave, and shone forth with new lustre. *On the day called Sunday*, therefore, saith Justin, *all of us, whether we live in the city or the country, meet in one place: where*

* Heb. x. 25. † Plin. lib. x. Ep. 97. ‡ Tert. Apol. c. 16.
§ Hieron. in Ps. cxviii. 24. Ambros. Serm. 60. tom. v. p. 81. ed. Par. ‖ Mal. iv. 2.

the writings of the Apostles and Prophets are read, an exhortation to live suitably to them is made by the president of the assembly, and we offer up our joint prayers. Then bread and wine is brought: and after repeated prayers and praises by the president, to which the people answer, Amen, it is distributed throughout the congregation; and alms are collected, and left in the president's hands for the use of the poor. After which he adds, *The reason why we all meet on Sundays, is, that this is the first day, in which God created the world, and on which our Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead* *.

Such was the obedience of the first Christians to the rules of the Gospel, though the laws of men punished it with death: whereas we, who call ourselves Christians too, and live in a time when God and man require the same thing, disobey both. And the consequence hath been, that whereas their zeal filled them with all piety and virtue, and converted the world to true religion; our lukewarmness hath made us negligent and bad in the whole of our conduct, and we are relapsing into the profligacy and atheism of the Pagans. For how indeed is it possible, that men should know their duty without being instructed, or regard it without being admonished? And what other sufficient instruction or admonition will the generality of those have, who despise that, which the word of God hath established for them? The church is the universal school, opened on this day by the Divine command, for teaching all men reverence to their Maker, love to their fellow-creatures, moral government of themselves; right and worthy and exemplary behaviour in every part of public and private life. We appeal to your consciences, whether

* Apol. i. § 67.

these things are not faithfully taught here: and if they be, whether it is not of the last importance, that the teaching of them be constantly frequented?

Many pleas and excuses are made on this head: but none will avail for the voluntary omission of what God hath appointed. Think then with your own hearts: hath he not appointed public prayers and preaching? and if he hath, why are not you to attend them? Some, who do, perhaps you will say, are not the better for it. But how can you know that? They might be still worse without it. Or supposing they are not better, if others are, (as undoubtedly multitudes are) why may not you hope to be so too? they who fail of it, fail through their own faults. Do you avoid those faults: and you may justly promise yourself much good from what, on many accounts, is so likely to *do* good. Perhaps you do not see this great likelihood. But is it not want of thinking, or of thinking fairly, that hinders you from seeing what to others is most evident? Or though you were incapable of seeing it, which is wiser, you or your Lord and Master?

Possibly however you admit, that preaching may be of service to the ignorant part of mankind, but apprehend it can inform you of nothing needful, which you do not already know. But are you indeed, after considering the point with impartiality and humility, quite sure of this? Or if you were, can you be reminded of nothing you did not think of? excited to nothing you did not practise? confirmed in nothing you do practise? receive no benefit of any kind? Why yes: there are preachers, from whom, now and then, some degree of rational entertainment may be expected: and such, when occasion offers, you are willing to hear. But is there any preacher,

from whom you can fail to hear things of the greatest moment to your present and eternal happiness; which, by laying hold of you just at that moment, may be the means of your escaping misery in both worlds? And is not this your main concern, in comparison of which, not only entertainment, but information in other matters, is a mere trifle? Besides, is hearing the preacher the chief inducement that should bring you hither? Far from it. It is hearing the word of God in the lessons: it is paying adoration to God in the prayers and psalms and hymns. If you attend not to these, you will partake of little real benefit from the sermon; and if you attend as you ought to these, you will never go back without improvement, though there be no sermon at all; and you may improve very much by the meanest that is delivered. For that depends, not on human performances, but on the Divine blessing. What doth the great Apostle himself say of his own preaching, and that of his companions? *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted: Apollos watered: but God gave the increase. So then neither is he, that planteth, any thing; neither he, that watereth: but God, that giveth the increase* *. Therefore wait on God for it constantly, in the ordinances, which he hath instituted; for you know not by whom he will send it: perhaps by the weakest instrument he hath; *that*, as the same Apostle speaks, *the excellency of the power may be of him, and not of us* †. Our blessed Lord assures all his disciples, that *where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them* ‡. And if he be there; it matters little, who else is not.

* 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6, 7. † 2 Cor. iv. 7. ‡ Matth. xviii. 20.

Still probably some of you will ask, Why should the blessing of God peculiarly follow public prayers and sermons, when you can make use of the same, or better, at home? But if you can, is it true that you do; and that you do it statedly? If not, this is only a poor attempt to deceive others and yourselves. But supposing you do: may not God with justice, try your obedience, by directing in what method you shall apply for his favours? And may he not with great wisdom, direct to this method? Unless mankind be taught to worship and obey the Sovereign Lord of all, they must be wicked and miserable. The generality cannot sufficiently learn in private to do this: and most of the remainder will not. Without some farther care, the lower sort will be absolute barbarians: and the upper, much worse, than they now are. Therefore God requires all to assemble for instruction. Were he to make exceptions: every one, that pleased, would imagine or pretend himself to be excepted. Therefore he prescribes it even to those, who may seem to need it least: but who in truth need his grace, as much as any. If they will condescend to set a good example in this respect to others, they shall be rewarded for it by spiritual benefits conferred on themselves. If they will not, the haughtiness of their fancied wisdom shall be punished by withdrawing the divine influences from them. And what is there, in this procedure, unworthy of God, who *resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble* * ?

But here some of the upper part of the world will reply, that they acknowledge the necessity of setting a good example: and therefore, amongst their neighbours and dependents in the country, they do go to church on Sunday. But is it there only, that ex-

* James iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

ample is necessary? Or is it not, if possible, more necessary in this wicked town than any where else? Doth not your family here, see your neglect of your duty to God, and learn from thence to neglect their duty, both to Him and you? Do not your neighbours and dependents in the country hear of your behaviour when absent from them? And will they not very naturally conclude, that if you worship your Maker only at some times and places, it is from no principle of conscience that you worship him at any?

But others will probably allege, that they would be much more regular and constant than they are, if it were not for frequent hindrances, which intervene, and prevent them. But do you not often throw these hindrances in your own way? At least, could you not easily, if you would, remove them out of your way? Business perhaps, that might be let alone, is done; or what might, with a little forecast, be well enough dispatched at other times, is reserved for Sunday; or what might be finished before church time, is delayed till then; or what one person might manage, keeps several at home. And do you think this fitting, and will it be thought so at the last day, that every thing else should be preferred before the most weighty of all things? that you should make excuses for not serving you Creator, which you would be ashamed to make in any other case, and can hardly make in this with a serious countenance? *Be not deceived: God is not mocked* *.

Some however will urge, that care of their health at least is a serious plea: and that, during the winter season, they cannot attend public worship, without hazard of it. Now unquestionably, where this is really so, God *will have mercy and not sacrifice* †. But

* Gal. vi. 7. † Matt. ix. 13. xii. 7.

do not these same people venture to expose their healths, on any day of the week besides, perhaps on some part of this very day, to much greater hazards, in places, to which they have much less call? And why then will they attempt in vain to blind others and themselves with this pretence?

But a still farther allegation is, that, could they come to church ever so safely, they cannot possibly: they have no accommodation there. Would to God all who have, would constantly use them! But were they, who allege that they have not, to speak their hearts: are they glad to make this excuse, or are they sorry? If the former, it is not a sincere one. If the latter, I heartly wish, that, where they are wanted, more places of worship were built. Some of these persons could do a great deal towards this: and probably they spend their money by no means so well. But at present there is room, for the poor without any expence, for the rich at very little expence, even in this town, at one time or another of the day, either at their own church, or some church or chapel very near them.

But the hours of church are inconvenient. And whose fault is it, that they are become so? We have not made them earlier: but these complainers have made theirs absurdly later. Why will they not, on this day at least, alter them back to what they were formerly? Do they not often bear with the inconvenience of as great or greater changes on very slight occasions? Why then must a change be thought impracticable or insupportable, in order to attend upon God and his word? Reflect a little, how very low your esteem of him must be, if you think this too much to submit to on his account. Indeed they, who do attend public worship on the former part of the

day, should remember, that it is equally appointed, equally useful on the latter also; and should dispose their family affairs in such a manner, as to be present (so many of them as can) at each: applying to their devotions that rule, which the wise man lays down concerning their charity: *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand. For thou knowest not, whether shall prosper, either this or that: or whether they both shall be alike good* *.

And as all ranks of men are jointly concerned in the duty of frequenting divine offices; all should allow their servants, and those with whom they have concerns, leisure for it. If they desire leisure for this purpose, refusing it is most shocking cruelty: and not contriving for it, is criminal in the next degree. But even though they do not desire it; exhorting, disposing, pressing them to it; nay insisting upon it, so far as we have authority, is matter both of conscience and prudence.

But now, from the public exercises of religion, I proceed,

2. To the private ones requisite on the Lord's day.

If, before we come to the congregation, we think of nothing serious; or as soon as we leave it, lay aside out of our minds every thing that we have said and heard and felt there: we must expect to be little the better for our attendance. And a principal cause, why men are commonly so very little the better, is the latter of these two great faults. Our Saviour himself hath told us: *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and considereth it not,* (for so we should translate) *then cometh the wicked one; and immediately catcheth away that, which was sown in his heart. This is he, that receiveth seed by the way side* †.

* Eccl. xi. 6. † Matth. xiii. 19. Mark iv. 15.

Since therefore hearing God's word is a duty of the day, that preparation for it beforehand, and reflection upon it afterwards, which are necessary to give it root within us, must be so too. And let us ask our consciences, do we practise both? Do we consider on the morning of the Lord's day, for what excellent ends it was distinguished from others; how carefully we ought to *keep our feet*, as the wise man expresses it, *when we go to the house of God* *; and what a sin we shall be guilty of, and what a loss we shall suffer, if we regard only outward form, and neglect inward improvement? Do we again, after church take the first convenient opportunity for retiring into ourselves: for thinking impartially, what is the proper use to make of all that hath been delivered to us; for determining, that we will make it, without loss of time, and for intreating the assistance of heaven, that we may: or are we glad to get rid of such unwelcome ideas, by any method, the first moment that we are able? And if our behaviour hath been blamable in respect hitherto, shall it be better for the future? And will we *give*, as the Apostle directs, *more earnest heed to the things, which we have heard, lest we let them slip* †?

But, besides the particular subjects, that have happened to be laid before us at church, we have need to consider frequently at home the general state of our hearts and lives, and what we have to hope or fear from it, here and hereafter. Such inquiries may indeed be made on other days: and the oftener the better. But is it likely they will, if they are omitted on that day, which is peculiarly proper for them, and on which we are continually reminded of them? Some have little time else for any deliberate self-examina-

* Eccl. v. 1. † Heb. ii. 1.

tion: none can have a fitter time: why then should any one throw it away? Is there nothing you have need to learn or amend? Perhaps there is so much, that you are afraid to set about thinking of it. If so, your only way is to set about it instantly. Every other remedy will increase the disease: this alone will remove it. But perhaps you cannot think to good purpose long together. Do then to good purpose what you can: bring yourself gradually to more: use pious books for your assistance. Perhaps they seem flat, and void of entertainment: but perhaps also, it is your fault that they do. Or if that were otherwise, is it not sufficient that by them you are instructed, exhorted, warned, reproved, when you want it? There is no pleasure in this. But did you never persist in applying to any thing, which at first gave you no pleasure? And should it not be the greatest pleasure to conquer your sins, to advance in goodness? Possibly in some of these books you meet with expressions now and then, which appear unelegant and singular: and they excite ludicrous ideas in your minds, instead of serious ones. But possibly too this may proceed entirely from your own ignorance, or wrong disposition. For the authors of many of them were men of both as good understanding, and as good breeding, as any, either in their own times, or the present. Or suppose the defect to be theirs: yet surely, in other cases, you never slight useful information or direction, because it is accompanied by a few peculiarities; and why should you in this?

But it may be your hindrance is of a different kind. You are afraid, that employing regularly part of your Sunday's leisure thus, will expose you to ridicule, as formal superstitious wretches. And have you no

fear on the other side then, that employing it idly will expose you to censure, as irreligious and profane wretches? Besides, there is no occasion for all persons to know how your time is spent. Or if they did, are you to make the opinion, or perhaps only the pretended opinion of every inconsiderate creature, the rule of your life? Think, how far that would carry you. And if what they are pleased to call superstition, or preciseness, will lead you to every thing right and good; and the neglect of it will lead to the contrary; be not ashamed of it for a few reproachful names; but secure to your private use, without aiming to be remarkable in doing it, a share of the Lord's day, proportioned to what your case requires, and your circumstances admit: improve your minds in religious knowledge by reading; improve your hearts in religious affections by meditation and prayer; guard your steps by firm but prudent resolutions: and let neither imaginary nor small impediments keep you from this. At least make it an usual practice; but, if possible, a constant one. For the oftener you omit it, the stronger temptation you will be under to lay it aside; and the more statedly you perform it, the surer you will be of receiving, not only much benefit, but, after a while, much comfort from it.

Till you take the proper care of your own behaviour on the Lord's day, it must be with an ill grace, and with small success, that you can attempt to regulate that of persons belonging to you, though it concerns you very much, on more accounts than a few. And therefore you ought to be religious, for this reason amongst weightier, to make them so. But to be so yourself and neglect them, is wonderfully inconsistent. And yet many, whose sincerity in religion one dares not question, suffer their ser-

vants, if not their children, to live without any regard to it, or any knowledge of it: as if they were totally indifferent, both about their future happiness, and their own present interest. Very often they have not the shadow of an excuse to make for this inattention. Sometimes business is pleaded. But on Sundays, at least, there must or should be leisure: and it is both unwise and wicked to spend it in trifling or indolence, to the omission of so important a care; which consequently is one of the private duties of the day. Hear the injunction of God to the Jews, which cannot be less in force among Christians. *The words, which I command thee, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children: and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up* *. This doth not mean, that our conversation should be of nothing besides religion: but it must mean, that religion should have a due share in it; and doubtless then a peculiar share on the day, which God hath hallowed. Employing a part of that in giving those about you the obvious proofs of Christianity, just notions of the holiness of the divine law, and their need of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier, instruction in their various duties to God and man, and themselves, joyful expectations of the rewards of piety, awful apprehensions of the consequences of sin, affectionate cautions against the dangers, to which they are exposed, will be a most improving exercise to yourselves, and afford you the most rational prospect of gaining an useful influence over them, to your own comfort, and to their good in this life and the next. Your children are part of yourselves: all, who depend on you, are

* Deut. vi. 6, 7.

placed under your inspection. You complain perhaps of both. Why then will you not use the opportunity of this day, to remedy what you complain of? In all likelihood they will be much the worse for the day, unless you endeavour to make them the better. You cannot indeed be sure of prevailing with them. But if you do your best in a prudent manner, and engage others to do what you cannot so properly do in person, you will not fail of being able to say in general, *As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord* *. They, who have never been vicious, may usually with ease be made religious, by good advice and good books, a regular example set them, and a good-natured watchfulness over them. The very worst may be either restrained or removed; perhaps may be reformed. And how excellent an use of the day this would be, I shall leave upon your thoughts in the words of Scripture: *He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins* †.

* Josh. xxiv. 15. † James v. 20.

SERMON XVI.

GEN. ii. 3.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work; which God created and made.

HAVING proposed from these words to shew,

I. On what authority the appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion stands;

II. In what manner that day ought to be spent:

I have, in two discourses, finished the former of these heads, and made some entrance on the latter: under which I have considered our obligations,

1. To attend public worship and instruction on this day:

2. To spend a due portion of it in the more private exercises of piety. And now I proceed to another duty; which is,

3. To rest from labour.

This indeed is not so strictly required of Christians on the Lord's day, as it was of Jews on the sabbath: to whom not only the fourth commandment prohibited work in general terms, but farther and more particular prohibitions were given, and the whole most severely enforced, in other parts of their law, as I have already observed to you. Nor would milder injunctions have suited the nature of the people: which required them to be treated, as St. Paul takes notice,

like children under age, or bond-servants * : to whom rules are always prescribed more minutely, and a more punctual observance of them is expected, and harsher punishments are inflicted, than after they are grown up to years of greater discretion, and more capable of being trusted to themselves. Indeed the most rigorous precautions proved insufficient, to make that wayward nation regard, long together, almost any part of their religion, before the captivity, and to enforce the observance of the sabbath, even after it †. But as profaneness and superstition very naturally prepare the way for each other; so when at length they had recovered from the former, they fell into the latter: and some would not so much as defend their lives on this day ‡, others would not cure a disease §, others would condemn the slightest common action, under the notion of its being work; as when the disciples rubbed a few ears of corn in their hands to eat ‖: which the Jews at this day insist was a transgression of the law. Nay, they are gone farther than their predecessors in our Saviour's time: for now they will not pull one of their cattle out of a pit on the sabbath, which then they would ¶. Jesus, the great restorer of rational piety, gave them the most convincing proofs, that they were never bound to abstain from such things **. Indeed, besides his other arguments, which you may read in the Gospels, a single rule, alleged by him on more occasions than one, that *God will have mercy and not sacrifice*, afforded the most satisfactory direction to every con-

* Gal. iv. 1—11. † Neh. xiii. 15—22.

‡ 1 Macc. ii. 31—41. § Matth. xii. 9—14. Mark iii. 1—6. Luke vi. 6—11. xiii. 10—17. xiv. 1—6.

‖ Matth. xii. 1—8. Mark ii. 23—28. Luke vi. 1—5.

¶ Matth. xii. 11. Luke xiv. 5. Nizz. vet. in Wagenseil, p. 207, 208. ** See the Texts, in notes § and ‖.

siderate mind. For if he preferred the exercise of needful humanity and goodness, before the most sacred institutions of his own worship, (so that the latter might be omitted, if else an opportunity of the former would be lost:) undoubtedly he would also choose mercy, rather than mere rest from labour, an appointment of plainly inferior rank. As for small and inconsiderable actions, they come not properly under the denomination of work: and unless forbidden by name, were always to be deemed objects beneath the attention of the law. Nor are we Christians bound to the same rigour of external observations, which the Jews were. For the world being arrived at a proper maturity for it, our blessed Redeemer hath delivered all the children of God from that subjection to these elements, which their former state of infancy required: and place them under the milder discipline of a more ingenuous and manly obedience. Not the letter therefore, but the spirit and equity of the precept obliges us: only we must remember, that to abuse this gracious indulgence, would be ingratitude superadded to profaneness; and that our concern is, neither stupidly to *entangle* ourselves again *with the yoke of bondage* when *Christ hath made us free* *, nor wickedly *use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh* †, or *a cloak of maliciousness* ‡.

To preserve this medium hath been the endeavour of his church, by prudently accommodating its practice to the varying circumstances of successive ages. Whilst the powers of this world were heathen, and many believers were servants for life to unbelieving masters; we do not find, that they refused to work, when commanded, on the Lord's day: well weighing, we may be sure, how much that would hurt the cause

* Gal. v. 1. † Gal. v. 13. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 16.

of Christianity; and that abstaining from labour on the day was neither so important in itself, as meeting for worship; nor founded on such evident authority of Christ and his Apostles, who probably were less explicit in the matter, because an injunction of that kind would both have exposed the primitive converts to much ill-treatment, and the Gospel itself to much calumny and suspicion. But as soon as ever the civil power was in the hands of Christians, they showed their regard to the day, in this respect as well as others *: and though they did not call it the Sabbath, or day of rest, for many hundreds of years †; yet they made it such immediately: only with some exceptions in particular points, which the nature of things, or the exigency of the times, appeared to demand. Concerning these, the following ages differed from each other, both in practice and judgment: commonly inclining to negligence, yet sometimes also to superstition. But they fell universally into one very great imprudence, of appointing a large number of holy days, besides the Lord's day; which degraded that, and obstructed needful industry. But amongst us, this evil was redressed at the Reformation, and matters were once again established on a right footing: till a spirit of excessive strictness arose, and led some to assert the necessity of as scrupulous, and as gloomy a rest, on our weekly festival, as ever the Jews had observed on theirs. Just apprehensions of danger from hence unaccountably hurried several both learned and devout men into the opposite extreme, without seeing it, and without suspecting (however strange it may appear to us now) that any harm was to be feared on that

* Cod. l. 3. tit. 12. leg. 3.

† Heylin, part 2. p. 60. &c. saith, not till 1000.

side *. Grievous animosities accompanied the dispute, which contributed not a little to the general confusion that happened soon after. Since the Restoration, opinions have become gradually more reasonable; but practice hath grown so very loose, notwithstanding repeated laws for the regulation of it, that few need be told what is permitted on this day; but multitudes want much to be reminded of what is required, and forbidden.

Now so much rest is evidently required, as will suffice for the exercises of religion, public and private, and the purposes of mercy to ourselves, our servants and our cattle, for which the day was appointed. And whoever considers, how many and important these are, and that there must be one rule fixed for all persons to go by, cannot fail to see, that no other will answer the end, than that of excluding worldly cares and employments, as much as possible, from morning to night. When we have removed ourselves, as far as we can, from common business, it is mighty apt to intrude upon our thoughts, and drive out better things. But how much more would it do so, were we always to come immediately from it hither, and return immediately to it again.

Still such works as are necessary for the support of life, or restoring sick persons to health, or preserving others from attacks of great disorders to which they are liable, may and must be done upon the Lord's day: only the doers of them should be peculiarly careful to spend some of the remainder of it in acts of piety, which they too often sadly neglect.

* Heylin saith, in the dedication of his first part to the king, that "in such a church as this, there was no fear, that ever the Lord's day would have been over-run by the profane neglect of any pious duty, on that day required."

If labour of any other sort could be ordinarily permitted on this day, it must be that of cultivating the earth, and gathering in the fruits of it: the proper seasons for which, especially for the latter, may otherwise be lost. And accordingly allowances of that kind have been formerly granted by law *. But they have been found so little needful, and so liable to abuse, that these laws have been repealed, and that of Moses resumed: *six days shalt thou work; but on the seventh, in earing*, that is, in ploughing *time, and in harvest, thou shalt rest* †. Never, I believe, hath any general scarcity, seldom, if ever, any great distress in any particular place happened, merely by observing this rule. But were the breach of it indulged, whenever the persons concerned should think it necessary; many of them would plead the necessity every year, and in a little while throughout the year: so their servants and cattle would be kept to incessant toil; and just that part of the world, which most needs instructing and civilizing, that is, the lowest, would have by far the least opportunity for it.

And if working is not to be allowed on the plea of necessity in their case, much less can it in others, where the urgency is not so great. There is no occupation, in which the labour of six days will not maintain a diligent and frugal man for the seventh, unless he wants health and strength, or is burthened with a helpless family: and these things entitle him to public relief. So that every one may have leisure, on this day, for serving his Maker, for improving himself in his duty, for teaching those, who belong to him, theirs; for enjoying also a comfortable share of ease and refreshment. And if any one, from sordid

* Constantine first made a law for this purpose. Cod. lib. 3. tit. 12. leg. 3.

† Exod. xxxiv. 21.

attachment to his own interest and profit, is unwilling to take leisure for these purposes, he little understands what his real interest consists in; and should not be suffered, either to keep such, as are under him, from spending this portion of their lives better; or to make advantages to himself by labour, when others, for such good reasons, abstain from it.

The laws of our country therefore are both just and wise, in prohibiting not only work, but (with proper exceptions) buying and selling on the Lord's day. For they fill up the time and thoughts, and detain men from the exercises of religion, as effectually as more fatiguing employments: nor will it be at all difficult, with a little contrivance, to avoid them. And it is both irreligious to do these things needlessly, and cruel also to force others, either to violate their consciences by exercising their callings when they ought not, or to lose their business by refusing to trangress their duty. But if private persons will not attend to such considerations, public magistrates, as guardians of the laws, should carefully support the innocent, by punishing the guilty.

Besides these ways of breaking the holy rest of this day, another is, needless travelling upon it. If people take journies then about their common business, it is as directly following their trade, as keeping open shop. If the journey be the only business, it is trespassing on the quiet, probably too on the worship of the day, in the face of all the world. And this is often done so absolutely without any colour of sufficient reason, that it must be mere affectation: surely not a proper behaviour towards our Maker, nor a reputable one amongst our fellow-creatures. Possibly some of the great originally took it up as a distinction: but whoever will, may very easily distinguish him-

self in the same manner. Indeed too many, both of middle and even low condition, have already learnt to do so: go out early on parties of diversion and amusement, from which they return late; throw away the most sacred portion of their time, and not a little of their money, on follies, if not vices, of which they thus acquire a destructive relish; leave their families, if they have any, exposed to all manner of temptations; and set both them and their acquaintance an example of disregard to duty, and of madness for pleasure, too likely to ruin them in this life and the next.

But without worldly business, and without stirring far from their own houses, men frequently contrive to give themselves but little rest, and their servants yet less: partly by unnecessary entertainments and company at home, partly by a multitude of unnecessary visits abroad; which between them so employ several of the family, if not the whole, that scarce any day of the week is so void of leisure. Now suppose these occupations were ever so far from being laborious, yet it is by no means fitting, that hours allotted to piety and recollection should be consumed and swallowed up in a hurry of trifles. We ought to allow seasons of quiet to our minds, as well as our bodies, that they may cool into serious thoughtfulness: and when shall that be, if not on this day? We ought likewise to afford every one under us due opportunities for learning, considering, resolving, praying; and *give them* in this respect, no less than others, *what is just and equal; knowing that we also have a Master in heaven* *. If they desire it, a refusal is gross inhumanity. If they desire it not, they need it but the more. And instead of pleading, that if they had vacant time, they would use it ill; the right way is, to

* Col. iv. 1.

provide it for them, and endeavour that they may use it well. Thus at least we shall have done our duty: which we shall usually find in every sense, but constantly in the best, is consulting our interest.

After all that hath been said, there may sometimes remain doubts concerning the extent of the repose, enjoined by this precept. And then our best rule will be, on the one hand, not to take liberties beyond the permission of the laws, and the practice of the more pious and considerate part of our neighbours; and on the other not to scruple, what propriety and decency and reasonable convenience require.

But farther, as hardly any one is capable of spending the whole, and very few near the whole, of our day of rest in religious exercises, to good purpose; it will be requisite to inquire, in the last place, how we are to employ the intervals and the remainder of it, which we need not or cannot employ thus.

Now there is nothing more fitly joined with acts of piety, than acts of charity: one excellent species of which, instructing and exhorting those, who belong to us, hath been already mentioned: and extending the same good office, in a prudent manner, farther, as occasion serves, is an employment admirably suited to the day. Reconciling ourselves upon it to persons, between whom and us any displeasure hath been, is peculiarly recommended by the reason of the thing, as well as by a canon of our church *. Visiting the poor and sick, not barely in the common meaning of the word *visit*, but in the scriptural sense, of taking a kind notice of their wants, is not only directed by the same canon, but countenanced by St. Paul: who gave an order both to the Galatians and the Corinthians, in a particular exigency (which is

* Can. 13.

equally a good rule in others), that each of them, on *the first day of the week*, should appropriate something towards the necessities of the saints, *as God had prospered him* *. And it is one delightful view of the day, to look on it as consecrated, amongst other excellent purposes, to that of forming and executing designs of tenderness and compassion to our distressed brethren.

But even where there is no room for doing what is commonly called charity, mere friendly intercourse and conversation, with our relations, neighbours and acquaintance (if it take not up too much time), is a demonstration of good will which contributes greatly to our mutual happiness. And God's providing the frequent return of a day, when all the world should be released from confinement and toil, and at liberty to shew themselves in the most advantageous and pleasing light to each other, (a liberty which few in proportion would ever enjoy, were it not for this their sabbath,) is an action worthy of our gracious Maker, and of unspeakable moment for promoting courtesy, affability, and kind affections. But it is more especially useful for softening and polishing the rugged tempers and manners of the lower sort of men: who ought on many accounts highly to value their festival days, which one of the principal heathen philosophers, Plato, saith, the Gods appointed in pity to mankind †. It was not therefore intended, that we should pass our Lord's day in sullen retirement, shunning human converse, or infecting each other with melancholy. The Jews were bid to *rejoice* in their feasts *before the Lord their God* ‡. Christians are bid to *rejoice in the Lord always* §. And a very

* 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. † Plat. de Leg. l. 2.
‡ Lev. xxiii. 40. Deut. xii. 12. 18. xvi. 11. xxvii. 7.
§ Phil. iv. 4.

ancient Father, Tertullian, informs us, that *on the Sunday*, for so he calls it, *they indulged* peculiarly *to joy**; as well they might, since he who died *for our sins, then rose for our justification* †. Indeed would we but practise Christianity as we ought, we should find its promises of pardon and strength, its beneficial precepts, and glorious prospects, the assurance of God's love to us, and the exertion of our own love to him and our fellow-creatures, matter of the highest joy, both within ourselves, and amongst each other. And we are much to blame, that we banish religious topics from our discourse; which might be, if properly introduced, the most delightful part of it. Not that lower subjects of agreeable and cheerful conversation need be at all excluded from a share in the day: for harmless good humour is an amiable and useful virtue. Only we must take singular care now of what we should remember always: that nothing censorious or uncharitable, nothing profane or indecent, nothing too light and ludicrous, come out of our mouths: nothing unworthy of rational and religious persons. By such behaviour and communication, we shall observe the full import of the prophet Isaiah's direction to the Jews; that they should *honour the sabbath, not doing their own ways, nor finding their own pleasure, nor speaking their own words* ‡. This doth not mean, that whatsoever was pleasing was for that reason to be avoided by them: but that exercises of piety ought then to be their chief pleasure; and nothing unsuitable to them, however pleasing, done or uttered. They were not to say, *Our lips are our own: who is lord over us* § ? but at this time especially to prefer innocence before inclination.

* Apol. c. 16. † Rom. iv. 25.
‡ Isa. lviii. 13. § Ps. xii. 4.

And as cheerful discourse is not forbidden on the day, so neither is a cheerful use of God's creatures, who *hath given us richly all things to enjoy* *. The religious governor Nehemiah, after the people had been assembled to hear the law, dismissed them with these words: *Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord* †. And it is said of the first Christians, immediately after the mention of their worship, as if it followed immediately after, that *they did eat their meat with gladness, and singleness of heart, praising God* ‡. But then both over-plentiful indulgence, and luxurious delicacy, making the gratification of our appetite a serious study, or in the expressive language of Scripture, *a God of our belly* §, is very inconsistent, not only with the business of the day, but with our whole profession. And yet more so are intemperance and debauchery: which profane our sabbath beyond comparison worse than labouring upon it would do; pervert it from the service of God to that of the devil; and make it a public mischief instead of a blessing. To prevent this therefore every one ought carefully to watch over himself, parents over their children, heads of houses over their families, and magistrates over the whole community. For very few things would either do inferiors more good, or entitle superiors to a larger share of divine favour, than if the latter would enable themselves to say, with the excellent governor above mentioned: *I commanded to sanctify the sabbath-day: remember me, O my God, concerning this, and spare me, according to the greatness of thy mercy* ‖.

But here a question may be put; supposing vice be

* 1 Tim. vi. 17. † Neh. viii. 10. ‡ Acts ii. 46, 47.
§ Phil. iii. 19. ‖ Neh. xiii. 22.

avoided, may not amusements and diversions be allowed? Now in the first place, who are they that ask this? Persons that neglect religious duties? They have no right to ask it. Let them do what is commanded on the day, before they examine what is permitted: else their inquiry comes only to this, whether they may disregard it from beginning to end. For such to plead for relaxations after the business of the day is over, when, God knows, their whole business upon it hath been idleness or worse, is beyond measure absurd. And therefore, when some recreations on Sunday in the afternoon were unadvisedly permitted by authority, for a while, above an hundred years ago, they, who had not first attended both morning and evening service, were expressly forbidden to partake of them. And of those, who do attend the service of God, very few desire them. Such of the labouring and lower sort of the trading people, as profess any seriousness, are well content with indulging themselves afterwards, at home in amicable conversation, or abroad in a friendly visit, or the refreshment of going for a while to contemplate the beauties of the creation, which this day was appointed, amongst other things, to commemorate. And they are very sensible, that taking liberties, at all considerably greater, would be unfit and unsafe. The minds of men, even while they were at church, would be running on the diversions, that were to follow: they would be tempted by them to neglect, perhaps entirely, religious exercises in private: their amusements would grow to be light or indecent, or tumultuous and mischievous, or both: expences and excesses, drunkenness and debaucheries, quarrels and disorders, would attend them: the day would come by degrees to be regarded as a day of sport only; and

if once pious thoughts were banished at the time peculiarly appointed for them, when would they find a place in our hearts?

Now if these considerations ought to weigh, and do weigh, with those who are almost constantly kept to business, and for whom alone, on that account, the recreations formerly allowed were intended and calculated; much more may they, who have leisure for them nearly as often as they will, and perhaps employ a great deal too much of the remainder of the week in them, afford without murmuring to distinguish one day in seven by abstaining from them. Still the few of those, who do not abstain from them, and yet behave like serious persons in other instances, ought to be respected as such; and judged of, in this particular, with moderation and charity. But surely at the same time they should be asked: Where is the need, where is the good, of these indulgences of yours on the Lord's day? If you are very fond of them, you ought, as reasonable creatures, and moral agents, to mortify a fondness, for which you can have no just ground. And if you are indifferent about them, for what cause do you affect to make this innovation: contrary, we apprehend, to religion; contrary, you must own, to the laws and usages of your country? Is it to show, that you think farther than the vulgar? Show it in somewhat better. Indeed, think a little farther still, and you will see, that compliance with wise customs is a wise thing. And why is not that custom such, which hath obtained universally amongst us, till of late, in this matter? Is the observation of this day grown so excessively strict within these few years, that there is a necessity of taking new methods to relax it? Are all your servants grown so immoderately scrupulous, that you must try to weaken the

force of principle in them, by giving them to understand, that you have but little of it yourselves? For while they conceive you to violate the sabbath, they will conceive you to disregard God. Is this then the light, in which you would have them, in which you would have other serious persons, consider you? Whether they will inveigh against you, or only grieve for you, why should you give them cause to do either? Why should you countenance and encourage the profane, tempt the conscientious, by your example, to do what they inwardly condemn, or help to make them look ridiculous, if they stand out? But indeed, could you bring all people into your own opinion, would it be desirable? Are not amusements, and particularly that of play, grown much too general and frequent and expensive already? And why would you increase it thus? Why would you have the lower part of the world, whom happily their business preserves from such things on other days, come to think them lawful on this; when they have full leisure for them, and may argue very plausibly in favour of their own inclinations from the practice of their superiors? Must not the introduction of these liberties probably keep them, often from church, almost always from being the better for going thither; give them quite a wrong turn, waste their small profits and earnings, and drive them to many unjust methods of repairing their losses, and supplying their extravagances; by which, I need not tell you, their betters must be sufferers? On these accounts an author, not suspected of any religion, whom I quoted in my first discourse on this subject, had however policy enough to see, and lay it down for a rule, that diversions ought to be strictly prohibited on the Lord's day. Indeed, besides these particular bad effects,

the use of them on that day must contribute in general to perpetuate without intermission an eagerness for pleasure and entertainment, irreconcileable with a spirit of piety, and to exclude serious thoughts even at the most serious times.

It hath been said, that such employment is better, than talking and hearing scandal. But I am afraid the former by no means prevents the latter. Or say it did, where is the necessity of either? If our amusements alone restrain us from evil-speaking, we should put ourselves without delay under the influence of better motives. It hath been pleaded also, that diversions are used in other countries on Sunday evenings without harm. But in some they are used at that time, because they consider the Sunday as over at that time: for they begin to observe it strictly the evening before, and we do not. But still many of them think even this an insufficient defence of the practice; though travellers may happen, and no wonder, to be chiefly acquainted with the freer sort. That it doth no harm, is easily said, but hard to be proved. And were it to do but little, where men have been long accustomed to it, and are withheld, by a more general seriousness, and a severer exercise of authority, from abusing it; yet it may do infinite mischief, where it comes recommended by the charms of novelty; and is so unlikely, so impossible to be confined within moderate bounds, as in this most licentious nation. We have much more need therefore to learn from foreign countries their practice of going to church both in the morning and afternoon of the day, than of recreations in the close of it: for it is extremely perverse to reject their authority in the former case, while we rely on it in the latter. And surely, upon the whole, every good,

every prudent person, instead of being zealous to propagate things of this nature, must see cause to discourage them, at least by abstaining from them; and to labour in every way, both for their own sakes and that of the public, to preserve (what there is much want of increasing) the small remainder of Christianity, that is left amongst us. Considered in our private capacities, our business here is, not to please ourselves without regard to consequences, but to spend the few sabbaths and few days, which we have to come on earth, that we may be qualified, at the end of them, to enter into that eternal sabbath, that *rest which remaineth for the people of God* * in heaven. And considered as a nation, we have great cause to remember, for our direction, the promise and the warning, which God gave the Jews for theirs. *If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight; the holy of the Lord, honourable—I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father* †: *But if ye will not hearken unto me, to hallow the sabbath day—I will kindle a fire in the gates of Jerusalem, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, and shall not be quenched* ‡.

* Heb. iv. 9. † Isaiah lviii. 13, 14. ‡ Jer. xvii. 27.

SERMON XVII.

PHIL. IV. 5.

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

THE word *moderation*, signifies in the original, that reasonableness of mind, which curbs the exorbitancies of all our passions, appetites, and imaginations; confining us to proper degrees of being affected by the things about us, and of exerting ourselves in relation to them: from which larger meaning it is naturally and easily contracted to express more especially the due restraints of desire and anger, fear and sorrow. In discoursing upon it therefore, I shall so treat of the temper in general, as to have a more immediate regard to these instances of it in particular, whilst I endeavour to recommend the virtue of moderation:

I. From its conduciveness to the practice of our duty.

II. From its good influence on the happiness of our lives here on earth.

III. From its importance to that succeeding state, the near approach of which the text places in our view.

I. I would shew, how conducive the keeping all our inward movements within just limits is to the

practice of our duty. But here it must be observed, that a merely natural vehemence of spirit is not strictly an actual sin, though it be one of the consequences of our original depravity, which we have usually much cause to lament. For it always puts us on a harder trial, than persons of a cooler temperament have to undergo. Yet still, the greater is our virtue, if we stand this trial: and the less our guilt, if we sometimes fail from infirmity or surprise. But if we act wrong through gross negligence or deliberate indulgence; that we were strongly inclined to it, is no good excuse: for as we could not but know our inclination, we ought to have watched against it, and checked it. Therefore it is not the warmth of temper, with which we are born, and against which we strive, but the wilful or heedless indulgence of it, that unfits us for the duties of life.

We are all of us very sensible, in the main, what those duties are: we seldom err much in any particular, when we really desire to know, what is incumbent on us: the fitness of pious and virtuous behaviour is evident to our understandings; and the esteem of it natural to our hearts. A stranger to human affairs would from this account immediately conclude, that surely scarce any one ever missed then of doing as he ought. We are unhappily too well acquainted with them to judge thus: and see the case to be so very much otherwise, that had we no other guide to direct our inquiries than our own reason, it would be impossible for us to say with any certainty, how we come to be so inconsistent with ourselves. But when once the Scripture hath taught us, that we have lost the primitive strength and uprightness, in which God created man, all the rest is easy.

For we are surrounded here, on every side, with worldly objects, capable of giving us pleasure and pain; and of stirring up in our corrupted natures excessive emotions of desire, hope, fear, anger, sorrow. These passions importunately solicit our attention; and according to the degree, in which they are gratified, engross it to themselves: till we find so many earthly things to long after, or to dread; to love, or to hate; to rejoice in, or to lament; and that with such immoderate earnestness; that virtue and religion are seldom thought of, and seldomer still to any good purpose: their obligations are, at some times with miserable subtlety eluded; and at others, resolutely and desperately broken through, even when we see what we are doing, and see the consequences.

These are the daily effects of being *too strongly* moved by the things of this life. And they are bitter streams, that will flow, till the fountain of our hearts * is healed and *purified by faith* † in that grace, which our blessed Lord hath procured for us by his death, and offers to us in his Gospel. Whatever we allow to make the greatest impression upon our minds, that will have the greatest influence on our conduct; and by degrees exclude every thing else. It is our Saviour's determination, that *no man can serve two masters* ‡: that is, when their commands interfere. We may indeed change from one to another, and so be faithful to neither, and displease both. But whatever we permit for the present to engage our attention, that for the present we shall pursue, and pass by or trample upon every thing else, which may stand in our way to it. Thus, if we

* 2 Kings i. 21, 22. James iii. 2. † Acts xv. 9.
‡ Matth. vi. 24. Luke xvi. 13.

indulge considerably the love of pleasure, of gain, of advancement; we may design indeed, or think we design, along with it, to keep within the bounds of temperance, of justice, of humility, and preserve a due regard to the interests of a future state. But these purposes will be ineffectual: the objects to which our fallen nature is prone, will, by the help of but a little partiality in their favour, fill our souls and bias our actions. Again: if we suffer ourselves to be discomposed by the happiness of others, we shall grow envious; if by injuries from others, we shall grow revengeful. If we let the more harmless passions of fear and sorrow become predominant, we shall unfit ourselves for usefulness in our stations, and weaken our sense of gratitude for the blessings of life. If we only give a loose to unmeaning fancy and caprice, we shall degrade the dignity of our species, and be hurried not only into folly, but sin. In what way soever inclination bears us along, beyond the sober dictates of reason, we shall be continually and almost irresistibly tempted to overlook and transgress those rules of duty, which a better command of ourselves would have enabled us to perceive and disposed us to observe.

Our Maker expects from us, that we should first measure the value of things rightly, then esteem them suitably to it. And almost the only error, by which we fail of this, is being affected too much by the concerns of the present world, and from thence too little by those of the next. There is, it must be owned, a great variety of wickedness amongst men: and sins directly opposite to each other. But in one point they agree notwithstanding: that the commission of them all is greatly owing to the same inconsiderate eagerness, by which we paint to our-

selves things here below in much too strong colours, and receive such deep impressions from them, as efface, for the time at least, all the dictates of prudence and of conscience. Indeed, over-much vehemence, even in matters that appear to have no tendency towards guilt, is both wrong in itself, and habituates men to the same vehemence on worse occasions. Nay, zeal for things that seem, or even are, good and laudable, if it exceed bounds, frequently misguides great numbers, either to mistake very strangely what they mean to aim at, or to use methods for attaining it, which are quite unjustifiable. This hath been so dreadfully the case in political and religious disputes, that every one disposed to uncommon heat about either, hath peculiar need to examine his heart, whether what he imagines to be necessary earnestness in the cause of God or his country, be not wholly or in part sinful impetuosity; and to watch carefully against that extreme; which may be as bad or worse than the lukewarm indifference of others.

Moderation then, about every thing relative to this world, is highly requisite for the practice of our duty. I proceed now to shew you,

II. That it is not less so for the present happiness of our lives.

Every one of our passions, appetites, and inclinations, when raised too high, is capable of giving us very uneasy agitations of mind: and some, if indulged at all beyond reason, are grievously painful to ourselves, and many ways prejudicial to those amongst whom we live. They of course will be enticed or provoked to the same unreasonableness, of which they have seen us guilty: and thus it is, that sins and sufferings propagate one another, and increase without end. But here I would consider more

distinctly the bad consequences of immoderate desire and anger, fear and grief.

They, that will not restrain their desires, must often earnestly wish for satisfactions, which they cannot in the least hope to obtain: and this directly brings on repining, despondence, misery. And usually such, as do hope, will also fear; and continue, perhaps a long time, in a very disagreeable suspense between both. Or let hope, if it can, be so strong as to exclude fear; and full expectation give the utmost pleasure: not to say, that such pleasure, whilst it lasts, is tumultuous, wastes the spirits, and wears the frame; only think, how often, in a world so uncertain, it will vanish all at once; and what effects a sudden fall from this paradise must have on a mind impatient and undisciplined! But supposing no such disappointment to happen: persons of an eager and restless temper, after gaining one point, are apt to be immediately just as solicitous about another: so they are always in pursuit, and never contented. *What hath man of all his labour; and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? All his days are sorrows, and his travel, grief: yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This also is vanity**. Very gentle and governable desires would sufficiently excite us to consider what is really worth acquiring, and to bestow upon it the labour which it deserves. Besides, not uncommonly people miss the object of their wishes, merely by over-great anxiety about obtaining it. And being anxious for any thing beyond its capacity of giving us true happiness, can do us no service; but much harm it easily may. Now, that the several things which mankind run after so passionately do not make them happy, is a notorious

* Eccl. ii. 22, 23.

fact. Every day we see those, who have been the most successful in the race, as miserable as any: or we might see it, if we would, with the least reflection. And to what is it then, that they are sacrificing the real present enjoyment of their beings?

Another passion, in which we are extremely prone to be excessive, and wretched by the excess, is anger. We let very small matters move us very greatly; sometimes imaginary faults of others: and so we disquiet and torment ourselves, as well as them, without any manner of cause. A little study of moderation would prevent all this, and more evil; would suppress that absurd unreasonableness, which puts us often out of humour, and now and then violently, without knowing why we are so: would teach us to distinguish (which we commonly forget to do) those who have not offended us from those who have; and would never allow us to punish the innocent with the guilty. For want of this, resentment boils within us, and perhaps flames out, to our extreme hurt in several respects, against such as very innocently, from accident or ignorance, or a just regard to themselves or their friends, or it may be a kind one to us, stand in the way of any thing, that we want to do or have. But even supposing that men really treat us ill, yet it must be our wisdom and our interest to consider coolly, what alleviations may be pleaded: what mistake or inadvertence of theirs, what indiscretion of ours, or suggestion of others, may have occasioned the misdemeanor. And a calm temper will presume, that there may be alleviations, where none appear. Or if there were none, it would still reflect, that in this world, things will go wrong, and human creatures act amiss: that we must prepare ourselves for such events, and not be shocked at them: that the offender

is our brother, whom we ought to love; and that, with all his faults, we are but too like him; subject, if not to the same, yet to others; and possibly, all circumstances weighed, nearly as bad, or worse. Now such reflexions, made habitual, would contribute unspeakably to the tranquillity and comfort of our lives. Anger always gives pain to him who feels it: and we should avoid feeling that pain as much as we can. It rises also, with amazing suddenness, almost in spite of us, if once we give it vent, to the most unexpected and pernicious extremities. Even the lower degrees of it displease, and are intended to displease, the persons against whom it is expressed; this excites them to make such returns, as cannot fail to be uneasy to us, but often do us great and lasting and irreparable mischief: and from hence a very large part of the misery, that men undergo, proceeds. We have but seldom really considerable provocations; and therefore it is absurd to be affected, as if we had them frequently: and how considerable soever they may be, it is highly imprudent to let ourselves be hurried away, we know not whither, by a blind and injurious rage, the parent of innumerable inconveniences and fruitless repentance; instead of *possessing our souls in patience* *; and endeavouring to remove, by *meekness of wisdom* †, whatever would make our passage through life uncomfortable. But we ought to be singularly mild towards those, who in reality give us no provocation; as they certainly do not, who only presume to differ from us in opinion, be it in religion or politics, or any other point. Yet such differences have produced more of that *wrath of man*, which *worketh not the righteousness of God* ‡, more bitter contentions, and more shocking barbarities, even amongst the professed

* Luke xxi. 19. † James iii. 13. ‡ James i. 20.

disciples of the *meek and lowly* * Jesus, than almost any other cause hath done any where on earth.

Two other passions, nearly allied, which often run to a miserable excess, are fear and grief: as indeed, when desire of and delight in any thing of this world is too vehement, the apprehension of losing it, and concern for having lost it, will be vehement in proportion. And therefore we must endeavour to moderate the two former of these emotions, if we would moderate the latter effectually. But indeed we can often be much afflicted on parting with that in which we had little pleasure: and extremely disturbed with fear of what is by no means likely to happen; or if it should happen, would do us but little harm; and will certainly do us not the less but the more, for being immoderately disquieted about it beforehand, or grieved at it afterwards. But I shall dwell no longer on these two passions, because the weakness and wretchedness of indulging them is universally acknowledged; though that acknowledgment is far from putting men sufficiently on their guard against them. Only it should be added here, that avoiding excess of anxiety under the troubles of life, as it is a very common meaning of the word, translated *moderation*, was that in all likelihood, which St. Paul had chiefly in his mind. For it immediately follows: *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ* †.

Here therefore I shall conclude this head. For there will be no end of reckoning up minutely the instances of being too strongly agitated by worldly things, and the mischiefs that follow it: precipitate

* Matth. xi. 29. † Phil. vi. 6, 7.

judgments, rash resolutions and hasty choices, made and persevered in; partial fondnesses, unreasonable aversions, endless animosities, obstinate pursuits of our own ruin: then utter discontent with ourselves, the whole world, and the Maker of it: every folly, every sin and suffering, of which an ungoverned mind is capable.

Thus then the present wisdom appears of diligently cultivating, and I must add, (for without it, all your diligence will be in vain) earnestly praying for, that calmness and *moderation* of spirit, which the Apostle requires that we should not only have, but should also *let it be known unto all men:* an expression comprehending several particulars of great moment: that we should not be satisfied with our own opinion, that we rule our passions well, (a matter about which we are daily deceived) but proceed in the discipline of them, till every one else allows us to be masters; that the good effects of our composure should be perceived and felt, not only at some times, and by some persons, but always by all who are concerned with us; and lastly, that we should be careful to shew the world around us, by our example, set before them with decency and modesty, how possible, how becoming, how beneficial, the practice of this virtue is.

And the motive, subjoined to this precept, is a powerful one indeed: which therefore I proposed to lay before you—

III. Its importance to our obtaining a favourable sentence in the approaching day of judgment, and eternal blessedness in our future life. *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

However plainly it appears, that strict self-government is the true secret for self-enjoyment here, yet the whole world hath agreed and resolved upon it,

that the contrary shall be true: that the life for a man to lead, who will make the most of his time on earth, is in a course of eager desires, vehement pursuits, and high expectations, unbounded indulgence in what he likes, and keen resentments against all that would disappoint him. Each confirms the other in this way of thinking and acting. That we see one another miserable by it, nay feel ourselves to be so, this avails not: we go on still, and scarce any one hath the courage to trust himself, and call the judgment of mankind in question. If it must be so then, let that point be insisted on no longer. But be the happiness of this life what it will; yet if this life be not all, if it be but a small part of what we are concerned in, it will deserve but a small part of our attention. And looking on human affairs in this light, will soon place before us a very different scene, from that which usually attracts our eye. Here we are pursuing pleasures, riches, rank, power, some imagination or another, belonging solely to this present state of things, as our great good: our whole hearts are engaged and overwhelmed in fears and hopes and joys and sorrows, arising from these objects, and nothing else for any continuance affects them. Yet all the while, this present state, and every thing in it, is confessedly a trifle, compared to that eternal one, which is to follow. What are we about then, and how unaccountably do we deceive ourselves! We are not really miserable, if things go contrary to our wishes here: we are not truly happy, if they go according to them. This world looks considerable, because its objects are near and glaring: but it deludes us. The whole that we have to do with it, is the least and meanest part of the business of our existence: and the time will come, when we shall see its enjoyments

and its sufferings, all it can promise or threaten, to be nothing; and that the difference between having gone through it in prosperous or adverse circumstances, is not worth mentioning. Now what we shall see to be true hereafter, is true at present: and we should endeavour to be affected by it accordingly. If we were, we should be little affected by any thing besides: but should pass our days in a happy calm; and pity those, who voluntarily fill theirs with disturbance and hurry; *walk in a vain shadow, and disquiet themselves in vain* *.

But the thought of a future state hath a yet farther and stronger influence in this case. The felicity of it is provided for those only, who have made themselves fit for it, through the help of God's grace, by an innocent behaviour, and religious frame of soul; neither of which is consistent with being attached, and given up, to the things here below. A heart and affections tied down to them, will grow like them: become earthly and base, insensible of pious and virtuous movements, unmeet for *the inheritance of the saints in light* †. *If any man love the world* inordinately, *the love of the Father is not in him* ‡. They are different spirits, thwarting each other continually: and we have only to choose, of which we will be; for of both we cannot.

And it is a most weighty consideration towards determining our choice, that the time which we have, either for busying and gratifying ourselves here, or preparing for hereafter, is of small duration. For *the Lord is at hand*. All that we can hope or dread, enjoy or suffer, in the present state, will soon be over, possibly very soon: and all that we can do to qualify us for the next, how much soever we want, must

* Ps. xxxix. 6, 7. † Col. i. 12. ‡ 1 John ii. 15.

be done in a very short space of time. The holy and self-denying Jesus, who expects and will assist us to imitate him, but will cast us off entirely if we neglect it, he hath said, *Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his works shall be* *. The truth of these things we all know; the consequences of them we all must see; and no words can make them plainer.

Not that either the affections or the appetites of our nature are to be extirpated, but only confined within due bounds. The necessaries of each one's condition in life are still to be provided, because they are necessaries. The duties, which we owe to each other here, are diligently to be done, because they are duties. The comforts of life too, as they ought to be thankfully received, may doubtless be cheerfully used. Nay even as to the lighter amusements, if we make them not a business, but a relaxation only, at fit times, and in a fit degree; since our infirmity may demand a little of them, that little cannot but be lawful. It is in truth, if we would consider justly, a very humbling reflexion to think we need them: but since we do, so much as we need must be innocent. And to perplex ourselves with scruples about small matters of this kind, would be at once distrusting the goodness of God, instead of enjoying it properly; and making our lives uneasy to ourselves, and religion unamiable to others. But though errors on this side ought to be mentioned, and are very pitiable when they happen; yet they are far from being common. It is the opposite extreme that mankind in general wants to be guarded against. Let us then remember that whatever lengths we go in the indulgence of any inclination beyond

* Rev. xxii. 12.

what is on one account or another plainly requisite, we should be sure to proceed with serious caution: for human virtue is very weak, and the solicitations of things present very powerful. In reason indeed they are of small moment: but in fact we find it infinitely difficult to sit loose to them, and reserve our souls for worthier objects. *Take heed* therefore to *yourselves*, that you *say* not *in your hearts, my Lord delayeth his coming*, and either *begin to smite your fellow servants*, or *to eat and drink with the drunken: take heed, lest your hearts be overcharged with the cares* or the pleasures, the resentments or the sorrows, *of this life; and that day come upon you unawares**. For *this I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth, that they that weep, be as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as though they used it not. For the fashion of this world passeth away* †.

* Matt. xxiv. 48, 49. Luke xxi. 34.

† 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31.

SERMON XVIII.

PROV. X. 7.

The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

FROM these words I shall endeavour to shew,

I. How great a concern men naturally have to leave an honourable memory behind them.

II. What care God hath taken, that both the good and the bad shall be esteemed after death, as they deserve.

III. What care we ought to take of the same thing.

I. That men have naturally an earnest solicitude, to leave an honourable memory behind them.

This indeed is not expressed, but evidently implied in the text: which being doubtless intended as a motive to good actions, and a discouragement from bad, can yet be neither, unless mankind are influenced by regard to future fame: which indeed they are to a very high degree. All men in all ages, with extremely few exceptions, if any, have both desired and endeavoured, that others should entertain a good opinion of them; and if possible, a great one. To this pursuit, multitudes have sacrificed their ease, their interest, the dearest of their other passions, and their lives themselves. They who have failed in it, have

given the strongest, and sometimes the most shocking and fatal proofs of their uneasiness: they who have succeeded, have always expressed the highest joy in the acquisition; and been celebrated and envied, as happy persons. Even the lowest part of the world have thought the esteem of their acquaintance, were the circle of them ever so narrow or mean, well worth having: and the most destitute of any considerable advantage or accomplishment to be valued for, have still set up some claim to reputation, were it a trifling, were it a groundless, were it an absurd one, rather than have none. They, who know they have forfeited their title to a good character, labour hard however, by concealing and palliating matters, to retain as much as they can of it. And even the abandoned to wickedness, who know their fellow-creatures in general must abhor them, still aim at a little comfort from the wretched applauses of their accomplices. They who take pains to get over the love of reputation, manifest, in spite of themselves, the utmost fondness for it, whenever they can have it; and often grievous longings after it, in those very cases, where they have destroyed it irrecoverably with their own hands. Even they who affect to ridicule it as a folly and a cheat, have usually nothing else in view than to obtain it, for a pretended sagacity in detecting the cheat. Nay, such as think their duty binds them to extirpate it from their breasts, as a frailty and a sin, certainly think they deserve, and almost constantly shew they expect, much the more of it on that account. A truly good person, indeed, will always, in the first place, *seek the honour, which cometh from God only* *. For if *we love the praise of men, more than his* †; our Saviour hath warned us, by the example

* John v. 44. † John xii. 43.

of the Jews, who were highly guilty of this weakness, that we shall neither judge nor act as we ought. And it would be a justly ruinous mistake, either to do bad things for the favourable opinion of those around us, or good things *to be seen of them* only, and *have* that for *our reward* *, instead of *setting God always before us* †, and *seeking for glory, honour, and immortality* ‡, by approving our hearts and lives to him. But still, desire of being esteemed by our fellow creatures, consistently with, and in subordination to, our Maker's approbation, is a natural, and therefore an innocent passion; prompts us to what is right, and supports us in it; and surely we have need of every support. Nor doth reason only, but Revelation recommend it to us, even in the more perfect dispensation of the New Testament itself: exhorting us to the practice of righteousness and peace from this motive: *For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men* §.

But we not only all desire an honourable repute, each according to his notion of it, in our life-time; whilst it may be serviceable to us, to be thought well of; and must at least be pleasing, to be told that we are: but we have earnest desires also of being remembered, as much to our advantage as possible, after we are gone. Accordingly, influenced by this hope, we both do and suffer a great deal, to accomplish things, the credit of which we shall live but a very little while to enjoy; nay, which perhaps will never be known, till we are dead: we vindicate ourselves to posterity, with almost as great solicitude, as to those of our own times; and feel it a powerful support under the heaviest censures that lie upon us

* Matth. vi. 1, 5.
† Psalm xvi. 8.
‡ Rom. ii. 7.
§ Rom. xiv. 18.

now, if we can hope, that such as come after us, will judge more impartially, and hold us in esteem.

Yet, all the while, we have little or no imagination, that we shall be then within reach of hearing what is said of us; or, in any manner whatever, benefited by praise, or hurt by reproach. For which reason, some men, who are very sensible of what use a present good character is, have treated all concern for posthumous fame as a mere absurdity; and valued themselves upon detecting it. Now really if it were one; it would be so palpable a one, that finding it out would be no mighty discovery. But indeed it is a gracious and wise provision of our Maker, for the happiness of his creatures: and the contrary persuasion arises, not from depth of inquiry, but superficialness.

In many, if not most things, Providence hath appointed our pleasure here below, to proceed much more from pursuit and expectation beforehand, than from enjoyment afterwards: by which method we have plainly some happiness both sooner and surer, than if it began only with the attainment of our wishes. It is true, we must also have some disappointment from hence: but this (besides that reason and experience will keep it from being excessive) may by religion be rendered extremely useful: as it shews, that complete and lasting satisfaction is not to be had on earth. Nay, if obtaining our desires were to give us no pleasure, indeed if we were never to obtain them, yet the pleasure we have in the prospect of obtaining them would certainly be valuable, in proportion to the degree of it: only abating for the uneasiness at last, of finding ourselves mistaken. But now in the case before us, though it were allowed that persons do not enjoy, after their deaths, the

reputation in which they are then held; yet they enjoy it long before, and that without any abatement to follow at all: for surely they are not uneasy in the other world, for want of knowing how they are honoured in this.

Besides, as virtuous and beneficial actions are by far the most certain way of procuring any durable esteem from mankind, so planting in us a desire of such esteem as may endure when we are gone, is providing no small security for our good behaviour here; and consequently for our own happiness, and that of all with whom we are concerned; but particularly of our children, relations and friends; who will doubtless be more regarded on account of the fair character that we have left behind us; and incited to imitate that conduct for which they see our memory honoured.

So that this principle, far from being an imposition on mankind, and a prejudice to be rooted out, is an important blessing, conferred on us by Heaven, and diligently to be cherished; even were it absolutely certain, that the dead neither have, nor ever shall have, any knowledge of the respect that is continued to them after their decease. But indeed it is by no means certain, that good persons departed may not in their present intermediate state, or however in that after the last judgment, receive considerable delight from knowing, some way or other, that the characters which they have deserved, have not been denied them, but honourably paid by their survivors. For as the desire of being esteemed is a natural principle, and one which worthy men beyond others cultivate and improve, why should we doubt of its subsisting hereafter, and being gratified? It is true, the blessed in heaven will be much above feeling pain from any

injurious treatment of their names on earth. But why may they not enjoy pleasure from a just regard shewn them? especially as this pleasure comprehends in it rejoicing that others do their duty, and that too such a part of their duty, as must singularly encourage the general practice of virtue. Besides, the good influence of their memory is one way, amongst others, by which they have faithfully endeavoured to be useful amongst men; and why should not the knowledge, that they have in some degree at least succeeded, be one ingredient in their reward?

No wonder then, if we rejoice now in the prospect of what we may hope will give us joy to all eternity; no wonder if the wise son of Sirach directs us;—*Have regard to thy name; for that shall continue with thee above a thousand great treasures of gold. A good life hath but a few days; but a good name endureth for ever* *.

Still it is extremely evident, (and yet very needful to remind men, who are strangely forgetful of it) that all this must be cautiously understood of such reputation only, as is truly good; sought from proper motives, and pursued by proper means. For if people affect to be admired for excellencies, which they have not, their attempt of cheating mankind will probably be as vain, as it is certainly unjust: if they court fame by qualifications of little or no value; all they can gain by it, will be of little or no use to the world or themselves: and if they aim at it by methods, that do harm amongst men; the higher their ambition rises, and the more fully it succeeds, the greater misery they will bring down, not only on others, but on their own heads too. Yet how dread-

* Ecclus. xli. 12, 13.

fully large are the numbers of those, who have aspired to reputation by the most insignificant accomplishments; either not from knowing them to be such, or from despair of acquiring better: of those, who, unwilling to labour honestly for a character, have thought to purchase it cheaper by falsehood and fraud: nay of those also, who not distinguishing between a great fame and a good one, or however preferring the former before the latter, have chosen rather to be talked of, and wondered at, for the surprising things which they have done, (however mischievous) than esteemed and loved for such beneficent actions, as they had in their power. And every one of these not only goes wrong himself, but contributes to lead others into the same mistake; or to prevent their discerning it when once made.

The happiness of men therefore is greatly concerned in avoiding such errors: and, as we are so very apt to fall into them, the goodness of God is very conspicuous in pointing them out so clearly in Scripture: not only stigmatizing those, *whose glory is in their shame* *, but warning us against so excessive an admiration even of things in themselves valuable, as interferes with the superior regard we owe to real piety and virtue. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord* †. And though the word of God most frequently and chiefly insists on other and nobler motives to a due regulation of our love of fame, yet is it far from either

* Phil. iii. 19. † Jer. ix. 23, 24.

forgetting or slighting this inferior one; that by a worthy conduct we shall obtain our desire, and by a criminal one fail of it entirely. For *the memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.* Let us therefore proceed to examine,

II. What care the goodness and justice of God have taken that both these things shall be so.

Now two methods, which he hath employed, have been mentioned already. He hath formed the hearts of men to esteem virtue, and abhor wickedness, wherever they see or remember it. And he hath made the happiness of men, private and public, greatly depend on the encouraging right actions by as durable honours as they can, and discountenancing wrong ones by as lasting infamy. So that if people will act suitably either to their best inward principles, or their evident interest, God hath made it secure, that the assertion laid down in the text shall be verified. And that, besides this general provision founded in our nature, there is also a particular providence, causing the memory of the just and good to flourish out of their ashes, and blasting that of the wicked; not only may be concluded, with very probable reason, from the divine attributes, but collected from express declarations of Scripture on this head. *The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance: his horn shall be exalted with honour: The ungodly shall see it and it shall grieve him; he shall gnash with his teeth and consume away: the desire of the ungodly shall perish* *, *and the candle of the wicked shall be put out* †.

Undoubtedly it would be a more pleasing consideration to worthy men, and seemingly a more efficacious one, if they could always hope that present

* Psalm cxii. 6, 9, 10. † Prov. xxiv. 20.

respect would be paid to their characters whilst living, as well as future to their memories when dead. And for the most part it is paid in a good measure; at least by such persons, as they chiefly desire should approve their conduct; and in such proportions, as are sufficient to give them sensible comfort and spirit to go on. But still the deficiencies in this respect are great, and the causes of those deficiencies many. Sometimes the imperfection of their goodness; sometimes the strictness of those rules, which they find necessary to preserve it; and sometimes also, for it must be owned, unnecessary peculiarities and imprudences which obscure it (as little faults will frequently hide great excellencies); these things, I say, often hinder very valuable men, though it is pity they should, from being esteemed in any tolerable degree like what they ought to be. And there are other yet greater hindrances, arising from other quarters: from the madness and wickedness of party zeal; from the hatred of the vicious and irreligious to those who often must oppose them, and always by their example at least put them to shame; from the envy of moderately good people, to such as one way or other come in competition with them; and from the inattention of most people to present merit, seen familiarly by them every day.

But still neither ought these things to be any discouragement to us, nor are they any objection to the wisdom of Providence. For, on the whole, it would probably not be to the advantage of good persons, but far from it, to have all the debt, which mankind owes them, paid immediately. It might endanger their humility: lead them to an uncharitable contempt of others, and a hazardous confidence in them-

selves. Both their virtue and their peace would be the less secure, the higher their reputation was raised: and the more they were influenced to what is good by the present applause of men; the less proof they would give, to their own hearts, as well as to the world, of seeking the future approbation of God; and of acting from that faith in things unseen, which ought to be the main principle of their conduct, and shall be the main foundation of their reward. Therefore, instead of being so angry as we commonly are, when any one fails of doing our character justice; were they to do it ever so much injustice, we should throw resentment out of our thoughts, and look upon every outrage of this sort as a means of improving ourselves; and indeed as one good mark, that we are in some degree such as we ought. For it is our Saviour's rule: *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you* *. *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets, which were before you* †. *Woe onto you, when all men shall speak well of you: for so did their fathers to the false prophets* ‡.

But when once good men are removed to another state, all the reasons, which made it unsafe for them to receive praise in this, are over; and most of the reasons, that made others unwilling to bestow it, are over too. Oppositions of interests are then usually at an end; party animosities cool, unjust imputations disperse and clear up; some begin to recollect, that they have been too vehement against those

* John xv. 19. † Matth. v. 11, 12. ‡ Luke vi. 26.

that are gone; others, that they have been too negligent of them; their loss is felt: their good qualities now stand in no man's way, their good deeds may be told without suspicion of flattery; over their imperfections and singularities a veil is thrown, partly by time, partly by common humanity, which is acknowledged peculiarly due to the ashes of the dead; we are surprised, that we could fail of discerning their worth sooner; and we pay them a double honour in their graves, by way of amends for what we defrauded them of before: not to say, that now and then we raise them a little higher, in hopes of depressing some that survive.

By these means it comes to pass, that though sometimes *there is no remembrance of the wise man more than of the fool:* (which appeared to Solomon, whenever it happened, so great an evil, that *he hated life* on account of it * :) yet generally speaking they who deserve well have at length due acknowledgments paid to their memory. More extensive merit will, as it ought, have more extensive commendation. But such, as move in a narrower sphere, obtain, perhaps full as constantly, all they wished for, and aimed at, in this respect: an honest repute, and friendly regret amongst their acquaintance. And those who are the least known; who may seem, as the son of Sirach expresses it, to *have no memorial;* but to *perish, as though they had never been:* if yet, as it follows in him, *they were merciful men,* it will be found that *their righteousness hath not been forgotten* †. They will almost always have some witnesses, to preserve the knowledge of their good desert, often such as are little thought of: and though very small notice may seem to be taken of them at present, yet

* Eccl. ii. 16, 17. See also ix. 15. † Ecclus. xliv. 9, 10.

sooner or later they will be remembered; and missed perhaps a great deal more than, if they knew it, they would wish. Nay, even such as *the world* hates and persecutes, because it *is not worthy of them* *; against whom it conspires, as the Jews did against the prophet, *saying; Let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered* †: if they have not immediately on their deaths the testimony borne them, which our Saviour in the same case had on his, *Certainly this was a righteous man* ‡; yet in process of time they *obtain* as the Apostle speaks, *a good report through faith* §. Or how long soever the piety and virtue of any persons may be hid and overwhelmed, yet, as He *who seeth* what is done *in secret, will reward them openly* ‖; let them ever comfort themselves, with being well assured, that if the world overlooks, or even oppresses them for a while, it will not always do so: for the day is coming, of which Christ himself hath said, *Whosoever shall confess me before men,* (as every one doth, that from a principle of conscience adheres to his duty) *him shall the Son of man confess before the angels of God* ¶. And *then* at least *shall the righteous,* in whatever obscurity involved before, and by whatever calumnies blackened, *shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father* **; *and stand in great boldness before the face of such as afflicted them, and made no account of their labours; who esteemed their life to be madness, and their end without honour* ††.

But *as for the ungodly it is not so with them* ‡‡: the undeserved regard, which is too frequently paid

* Heb. xi. 38. † Jer. xi. 19. ‡ Luke xxiii. 47.
§ Heb. ii. 39. ‖ Matth. vi. 4. ¶ Luke xii. 8.
** Matth. xiii. 43. †† Wisd. v. 1. 4. ‡‡ Psalm i. 5.

them in their lives; as, generally speaking, it must be insincere, so it seldom outlasts them any considerable time: their prosperity, that dazzled the eyes of man, vanishes: the fear or the favour for which they were courted, influences no longer: their power of concealing and disguising their ill deeds perishes with them; things, which they hoped were for ever buried in darkness, rise up against them; the superficial agreeableness of slighter good qualities, that gilded over their more important bad ones, coming now to be less tenderly handled, soon wears off, and leaves them visible in their full deformity: all who have been injured by them, and all who have been deceived in them, give vent to their indignation without restraint: their very partners in wickedness, instead of defending or excusing them, often designedly press down their memories under an aggravated load of imputations, to escape the more easily themselves; and even the candid and good-natured, however averse their inclination is to it, yet from principle give them up to the justice of public hate and infamy. Thus then doth *the name of the wicked rot:* becomes offensive to mankind, during all the while it lasts; and sometimes it lasts long, to be as the Scripture calls it, a *reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse* *: then moulders away, and falls gradually into oblivion; till the hour comes, that *they who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt* †.

You see therefore that God has not only declared in his holy word, that he will reward the good, and punish the bad in the next world; but has also even in this so established the tendencies of things that

* Jer. xxiv. 9. † Dan. xii. 2.

(supposing them to proceed at all in their natural course) virtue must at last be held in esteem, and vice in abhorrence. Nor will it be in the power of unwise or wicked men, though they do their worst, to prevent this in the main. Yet still, in many particular instances, we may if we will both by design and negligence disappoint the purposes of heaven for the good of mankind. But if we apprehend it, as surely we must, to be our duty and our interest, rather to become labourers together *with God* *, and forward the execution of his all-wise counsels; we shall be disposed to consider,

III. In what manner we may best contribute to the due payment of those very different regards, which belong to the memory of the bad and the good. For I beg leave under this head to invert the order of the text, and dispatch the disagreeable part of the subject first.

Now here, a principal thing to be observed is, that vehemence and bitterness are so unsuitable to the temper of religion, and yet we are so very prone to them, that whoever goes about to fix infamy on any one whom he dislikes, whether living or dead, should faithfully examine his own heart in the first place, and see *what spirit he is of* †. We cannot easily be too careful, (and it is very uncommon to be careful enough) that neither the selfish passions of interest, envy, resentment, nor the excess of any more generous principle, concern for public good, for virtue, for religion itself, ever move us to do injustice to any man's character: that we judge as mildly, as with reason we possibly can; and speak yet more mildly, than we judge. For there are multitudes of things, that may lead us into mistakes, by

* 1 Cor. iii. 9. † Luke ix. 55.

which we may be guilty of grievous and cruel outrages against the reputation of persons, who have done nothing amiss, whilst we mean perhaps only to be zealous in a good cause. Nay indeed, were there no danger of mistakes at all, severity of justice ill becomes creatures so liable to faults as men are. And severity against the memories of those, who are gone to answer for what they have done, hath so peculiar an appearance of inhumanity, that we should avoid it with double caution; whether they have lived in or near our own times, or in others ever so remote: though in the former case there is an additional consideration to restrain us, that unnecessary harsh treatment of worthless persons deceased, causes grief, that might well be spared, to their worthy relations and friends that survive.

But still, we are by no means forbidden, after all, to express a moderate and prudent disapprobation of bad people, either during their lives or after their deaths. On the contrary, due distinctions ought to be made: and shewing the characters of such in their true light may be extremely requisite; sometimes for the justification of innocent men, and often for a warning to inconsiderate ones: that they may see by the example of others, before it is too late, what sort of fame they must expect to leave behind them, if they will act contrary to their duty: that they may not confound with real substantial honour, those empty distinctions of names and titles, which the worst of men too frequently transmit to their posterity; nor flatter themselves that even in this undiscerning world there is any likelihood of *one event to the righteous and the wicked* *, in point of reputation, whatever may happen in other respects

* Eccl. ix. 2.

And especially, where admiration of any plausible character will probably seduce others into wrong conduct, their taking off the varnish from it, and exposing it naked to view, so far as may be requisite to prevent any dangerous mistakes, is an important duty.

But indeed, for the most part, the name of the wicked, if let alone, will rot of itself: and all that we shall need to do is, not to undertake the nauseous and fruitless office of embalming it. To endeavour this for private advantage, is one of the meanest and basest subserviences to sin. And even where gratitude or relation may demand from us some regard for the memory of wicked men, we should however always content ourselves, with saying in their favour what we can with truth; and keeping silence, as much as we are able, concerning the rest: but by no means take it amiss, if every one else doth not keep silence; nor expect in the least, that they, who have deserved ill upon the whole, should be esteemed by mankind, merely because they have deserved well of us. For by that rule, every wicked wretch upon earth, in his turn, must have a good character inviolably preserved to him.

But let us now proceed to the pleasing part of our duty, the honours that we owe to the memory of the just; whether they lived in former days or within our own knowledge.

Now the regards due to them are briefly these; that we believe them, on proper evidence, to be the good persons they were in reality; that we consider their virtues with due esteem, and their imperfections with due candour; that we vindicate their names from unjust imputations, and make honourable mention of them whenever a fit opportunity offers; that we warn and arm ourselves against the temptations, both of

prosperity and adversity, by observing how they have gone through each; that we incite ourselves to aim at more perfection in all Christian graces, by seeing in them what heights of piety and goodness are attainable; that we learn watchfulness from their falls, and a speedy and thorough repentance from their rising again; that we thank God in our retirements for the instructions which his providence hath vouchsafed to us in their good lives; and beg of him wisdom and strength, to *walk* as they did, *not by* the *sight* of things present, *but* the *faith* * of things to come.

It may be hoped, we are none of us so unhappy, as not to have had some such acquaintance amongst the great numbers of another sort, which whom we seldom fail to associate. And we are doubly to blame, if neither the good examples of ancient days, acknowledged by all men; nor the recent virtues, that we have seen in our contemporaries, some of them perhaps endeared to us by nearness of relation, or ties of friendship, can attract our affections and engage our imitation. Or if we have hitherto had no opportunity of being acquainted with such persons; yet, bad as the world is, they are still to be found in it; and all that are weak in goodness, are especially concerned to seek them out, take shelter under their protection, and invigorate themselves by their assistance. But, alas, instead of this, we attend, almost only, to such as can promote our worldly advantages, or favourite amusements; or such as enjoy an uncommon share of either: to those who can serve us, or delight us, we attach ourselves firmly; those who excel us in any part of the vanity and pride of life, we envy; account them the only happy men; and set our whole hearts on becoming happy in the same way. But serious,

* 2 Cor. v. 7.

humble, self-denying worth, we either quite overlook, or view with an eye of scorn, at best of contemptuous pity: ridicule, if not inveigh against, the truest piety and virtue, if it goes the least beyond that standard, which we have fixed for ourselves, from no better authority than custom or inclination; and are commonly much more severe against the involuntary or imaginary failings of the best people, than the wilful and habitual sins of the worst. Thus we behave to the good in their lives: or if we do happen to treat them a little better then, yet instantly on their deaths, we lay them aside, and are glad to think no more of them; not even of our own obligations to them: though perhaps we have had very particular ones; and certainly a general one of great importance; that such persons are as the Scripture calls them, *the salt of the earth* *: preserve the world by their wholesome influence, though much too thinly spread over it, yet from being utterly corrupted; and so restrain and mitigate the wrath of God, by their prayers and intercessions, that he often *spares the city for the* sake of the few *righteous that are* therein †. Let us remember then, what reason we have to honour the good, both living and dead; and to mourn when *the faithful fail from among the children of men* ‡: let us observe, and point out to observation, the usefulness and amiableness of religion in others; and make it as useful and amiable in ourselves as we possibly can: being not only admirers but *followers also of them, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises* §. For loving and imitating them here, will qualify us for being happy in an eternal fellowship with them hereafter. And though it is a much lower

* Matth. v. 13.
† Gen xviii. 24.
‡ Psalm xii. 1.
§ Heb. vi. 12.

consideration, yet it is far from a contemptible one that by honouring the characters of the worthy persons who are gone before us, we shall best secure that surviving regard to our own, which we all desire: and when *our bodies are buried in peace, our name shall live* *, and *our memorial not depart away* †.

* Ecclus. xliv. 14. † Ecclus. xxxix. 9.

NINE

SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH OF ST. JAMES, WESTMINSTER,

ON OCCASION OF THE

WAR AND REBELLION IN 1745.

SERMON I.

PREACHED ON A GENERAL FAST.

2 CHRON. XV. 2.

The Lord is with you, while ye be with him, and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.

THESE words are the beginning of a serious admonition, given by the direction of Heaven to the nation of the Jews, as they returned from obtaining, under the conduct of Asa their king, one of the greatest victories recorded in Scripture. Their condition, after this, might have appeared to human policy a very secure one: but the Divine wisdom saw the greatest of all dangers impending over them, that which proceeds from forgetting God, and abandoning virtue. *And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Azariah the Son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.* Now these great truths, of which Heaven thought it needful to remind them, at the conclusion of a prosperous war, it must be very much more needful that we should attend to, who seem to be only at the beginning of a doubtful one. And accordingly we are met here, by the command of authority, to consider our ways, and humble

ourselves before God for our sins, as the necessary means for deriving a blessing on our arms, and restoring and perpetuating peace and prosperity to our country.

It is a melancholy consideration, that creatures endued with reason and humanity should ever come to employ force against one another, and make the dreadful addition of the miseries of war to the many unavoidable sufferings of life. But wicked as this is, when passion and resentment, desire of unjust gain, or fondness of infamous glory, prompts to it: yet when injuries of pernicious consequence are done to a nation, and persisted in, and no competent redress can be obtained, it becomes then, both necessary for particular societies, and beneficial to human society in general, that invaded rights be vigorously asserted by the only way left. When the sword is drawn for justice alone, and ever ready to be sheathed as soon as that is granted, then Heaven may be appealed to, with hopes of a favourable *sentence coming forth from his presence, whose eyes behold the thing that is equal* *. But if the assertors of a righteous cause be in other respects a sinful people, it is evidently just for God, who hath the cognizance of both these things, to regard whichsoever of them Infinite Wisdom shall direct, and make even the injurious party *the rod of his anger, and the staff in the day of his indignation* †, to correct, or destroy, if their wickedness deserve it, such nations, as, though right in their disputes with their enemies, are wrong at the same time in matters more important. And how little terror soever our enemies might give us at first; yet now we must be sensible, that we know not in the least, how soon and how formidably they may increase: but this we know

* Psalm xvii. 2. † Isa. x. 5.

certainly, that *there is no restraint to the Lord*, to punish, as well as *to save, by many, or by few* *. Times of war therefore add a peculiar strength to those admonitions, which reason and Scripture give us at all times, to consider what our state is with regard to Him, *who doth according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth* †. Let us then all consider now, whether we have ground of hope or of fear from that awful declaration of the prophet, which you have heard read.

The Lord is with you, while ye be with him. To be with God, is to preserve in our minds a reverent sense of his being, presence, and government; to keep close to his laws, and stand on his side, against the opposite power of darkness and sin. Let us then think, if there be need of thought to answer; how is the reverence due to the Supreme Being preserved among us? Have we not persons who ridicule the notion of a wise and good Maker of all things? Have we not those, who, if they do admit a Creator, do not admit a moral governor of the world; or at least represent him so very defective in his administration of it, as finally to let bad persons be gainers by their wickedness, and good persons losers by their virtue: rejecting with mirthful scorn, what hath ever been the hope and support of wise and good men, the belief of that future state, in which the visible irregularities of the present shall be rectified? Have we not also too many, who, professing perhaps to believe in natural religion, yet speak of Christianity, the great means by which it is both supported and perfected, not only as a falsehood, but an impossibility: *blaspheming that worthy name by which we are called* ‡, and disdaining to receive from God himself any other rules, either of faith

* 1 Sam. xiv. 6. † Dan. iv. 35. ‡ James ii. 7.

or life, than such as their own reason, directed by their own fancy, shall prescribe to them? And let us suppose, if we can, that the number of such, as go these lengths deliberately, is upon the whole but small: yet what shall we say of the inconsiderately guilty? Are there not multitudes of all degrees, who seem never once to have asked themselves, whether they believe in God or not? or if they do, whether any regard is due to him or none: who slight religion boldly, without imagining they have ever examined it: who are persuaded of its truth perhaps, so far as they have any persuasion about the matter; but have no notion, that they are to regulate their conduct by it: who possibly do not quite approve of profane persons, but are astonished at pious ones; and by their indulgence to the former, and their very great proneness to despise the latter, plainly shew, whether they perceive it themselves or not, which party they are on the road to join?

We have indeed many still, who frequent divine worship: but how many of all ranks, and of that rank particularly, which ought to be an example, and will be one either of good or bad; how many that omit this duty entirely, or near it; and though it be an evident part of the law of nature, and an express precept of Christianity, can yet talk, not only of their own neglecting it, with much gaiety and humour, but of other persons attending upon it as matter of conscience, with much raillery? And such an ascendant hath this contemptuous kind of impiety got, that there are many persons, who sincerely honour their Maker in their hearts, but dare not for fear of derision shew it in their behaviour. Let it be thought of a little, what the appearance and construction of these things is: and let those who

are qualified for it, judge; is not this the one nation upon earth, in which regard to God is taught in the greatest purity, and treated with the greatest contempt?

But a worse symptom yet is, that whilst irreligious persons are active in the cause of infidelity; some of them with so self-denying a bigotry, as to teach it their servants, their very wives and children: the generality of such, as think themselves very competently religious persons, scarce appear to have any practical impressions at all made on them by those truths, which they acknowledge for the law of their lives. They forget, it may be feared, almost totally, the exercise of private piety; and behave in regard to public devotion with a negligence, which they would think highly indecent towards their earthly superiors: allow themselves in such levity of speech on the most serious subjects, as would scarce be justifiable in some of the most trifling ones; form their conduct avowedly on principles, that have no tincture in them of the faith, which they profess; and in effect declare themselves to think of nothing but this world, whilst yet they are really persuaded of another to come. To this it must be added, that very many, who not only believe, but are influenced by their belief in other respects, instead of *confessing their Lord and Master before men,* as he hath most solemnly commanded them *, are silent and indifferent, whilst he is denied, or disregarded ever so much; and seem ashamed of a cause they ought to glory in: by which means they give bad persons a colour for pretending, that few or none are Christians in earnest; and take away from such, as are well-disposed, the encouragement of seeing how great a number yet

* Matt. x. 32. Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26.

remains. For, God be thanked, they are still no small number, who continue after all bearing testimony to the Gospel of Christ. But of how many sins against it, not a few even of these are guilty at the same time, by deviating from *the form of sound words* *, by unwarrantable divisions, and uncharitable animosities; it is a great deal better that they should consider, than that others should say: only thus much cannot but be said, that these things add a peculiar gloom to the view, which we are taking.

Religion, it must be owned, hath never been practised any where as it ought. But have not both the practice and profession of it decayed most remarkably, in this nation, within the compass of but a few years? Is not the prospect before us, that of its declining yet much lower in the generation that is coming on? And what do we imagine this will end in? If God is, it must be a matter of ill desert, either wilfully or thoughtlessly to treat him, as if he were not. If he hath given a revelation of his will to mankind, it cannot be innocent to neglect it, as if he had given none. And if he is the righteous governor of the world, he will support his government by punishing where guilt appears. If the guilt be national, it must be expected the punishment will be so too. And though it were not, yet amidst the innumerable connexions of things, one part of a society cannot suffer, but the whole must partake.

What judgments in particular God will execute at any time on impious nations, we cannot say. All nature is in his power: and they, who offend, have every thing to fear. But one sure method of correction, (a very merciful method, as the lower degrees of it give warning of the higher, but a dreadful one in-

* 2 Tim. i. 13.

deed, if that warning be not taken) is by appointing the natural consequences of every sin to be part of its reward. The consequences of irreligion then what are they, and what must they be, on every community? True piety cannot induce men to injure their country; and comprehends peculiar inducements to serve it, of the greatest force. But in times of public danger especially, belief of religion gives a spirit, and defence of religion a motive for exerting it, which considerations of a lower nature will never equal. For what is there that can equal the exhortation, *Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people and for the cities of our God: and let the Lord do that which is good in his sight* *. *Fear not, neither be dismayed: for the battle is not yours, but God's* †. Whereas, if some, through infidelity have no hope in him, and others through wickedness have only fear of him, so far as these ways of thinking can influence, *all hands will be feeble, and every heart will melt* ‡.

But indeed the belief of a just and good Being, who sees and will reward, is at all times the great support under the sufferings of life, the great incitement to every thing worthy, the great restraint to every thing base. Human weakness evidently wants these things: and there is nothing else, that can always furnish them. The virtuous dictates of their own minds will have little influence comparatively on most men, when they are considered no longer as the voice of God speaking inwardly to them. And the penalties of human laws, without those of the divine law superadded, will often be evaded, and not seldom desperately braved. For if once men think there is nothing beyond death, they will soon come

* 1 Chron. xix. 13. † 2 Chron. xx. 15. ‡ Isa. xiii. 7.

to think there is nothing in it, which ought to withhold them from preferring a short life spent as they like, to a long one spent otherwise. Feeling themselves free from the terrors of religion, they will fly out into profligateness, merely to shew they are free: and it will be encouragement enough to them, to pursue every appetite, passion, and fancy, without reserve; that whatever inconveniences may happen to arise from it, one moment can deliver them from all at once, whenever they please. How then will they act in the numberless cases, to which the power of the magistrate either cannot or is not likely to reach at all, or but imperfectly at best? How, for instance, will the properties, and even the lives of men, be secured, when perjury is no longer dreaded? a consideration of peculiar weight in this country: where, with amazing inconsistence, we are multiplying oaths, as if we could depend upon them for every thing; and slighting the care of religion, which alone can give us cause to depend on them for any thing. But in general, what or whom can we possibly hope mankind will regard to any constant good purpose, if they will not regard God: and how can we pretend to regard him, whilst we go on as we do? Nor let it be thought, that the belief of a future recompense is necessary to the lower part of the world alone: though if it were, they will never preserve it long, when they see their superiors have it not. But the higher men's station, and the greater their power is, the more is the importance, both to others and themselves, that they be strongly influenced to do good and not evil, by this only motive that can never be outweighed.

It is very true, neither irreligious persons are always so bad, nor religious ones always so good,

as their notions lead them to be: but still every way of thinking produces, more or less, its natural effects. The deeper root religion takes, the more benefit will spring from it: and the wider irreligion spreads, the more mischief it will bring forth. At present it must endeavour to appear as harmless as it can, to recommend itself: and some degree of the good old impressions will remain, and have influence for a time, even on those who have done their best to wear them out. But when profaneness shall once have attained its maturity, then it will be felt, if men are resolved not to see it before, which were in the right: the weak and credulous creatures, who contended for honouring God; or the persons of superior knowledge and freedom of thought, who scorned and forsook him.

But we must remember, our Maker is forsaken, when virtue, the law he hath given to mankind, is transgressed; as well as when his worship is deserted, or his being denied. Let it then be a second article of inquiry, what our condition is in this respect.

The consequence appears a very plain one, that when religion decays, morals must. However, let us look into fact. In speaking of virtues and vices relating to the public, no matters of controversy ought so much as to be hinted at in this place: a place to be kept sacredly separate from the contests of parties; and only employed, when occasion requires, to call on every party alike, as in the name of God, to consider their doings. Where divisions and mutual accusations run so dreadfully high, there must be great faults on one side or other; 'tis well, if not on all. And all should consider very seriously, what they are aiming at, and by what means; what they are risking, and to what good end. But that above the rest

should be considered, which it may be feared is often thought of least, what must become, whilst each side is supporting itself by the methods too common, what must become of the virtue and integrity of this people, the most important part of all they have to be concerned for. Every other sort of loss nations have often recovered, and risen again from the lowest ebb: but loss of probity and principle, this affects the vitals of society: and whatever accidental advantages may seem to arise from it in any case for a time; if the distemper grows, and it is the hardest in the world to stop, its conclusion must be fatal. And let it not be objected that countries of very little virtue and public spirit have flourished notwithstanding. For how have they flourished? In a state of freedom? No. Outward prosperity hath been joined with domestic oppression: or if intervals of ease have been felt; they have always been precarious, and generally short.

Impartial reflections on these matters will shew us very clearly the guilt and the danger of our sins with respect to the public. But we shall see both in a yet stronger light, if we reflect farther, how very little zeal we express, in the midst of all our vehemence about disputed points, for the promotion of things indisputably right. Proposals for reformation are treated in the gross, as mere chimeras; mighty little harm apprehended from the most flagrant immoralities, but dreadful ill consequences to liberty from restraining them: laws treated with contempt by those who should obey them, and this connived at by those who should execute them; still every one complaining immoderately of others, for what no one will himself contribute to amend.

But indeed public virtue, though it were genuine,

will never be consistent and universal, while private vices are indulged. And to what a deplorable degree these abound amongst us, needs not be said, how much soever it needs to be thought of. The intemperance, the promiscuous lewdness, the want of industry and frugality, the disregard to authority and order, the profligateness of all kinds, that hath overspread in a most uncommon manner the lower part of the people, every body sees. And would but some of higher condition reflect, how much they have sunk themselves to a level with their inferiors, in some of the worst of their qualities; and indeed contributed to make many of them so bad as they are, and themselves despised by them at the same time; it might be hoped the consideration would be useful. But not to say more of these: the faults of too many, who are accounted, and are in comparison, decent and regular persons; their improvident expensiveness, pernicious many ways; their living to amusements and pleasures only, and overlooking the most serious obligations of life; forgetting the inspection of their own conduct, their families, and affairs; neglecting their very children, at least in the important point of their religion and morals; these are sad instances of personal guilt, and make a great addition to the national danger.

But when to the above mentioned epidemical sins, every one hath added, after examining himself faithfully, the separate transgressions of his own life, and the inward *plague*, which he hath permitted to infect *his own heart* *; unknown perhaps to men, but *naked and open to him, with whom we have to do* †: then we shall have no doubt left, whether the total amount be not abundantly sufficient to justify heaven, in

* 1 Kings viii. 38. † Heb. iv. 13.

whatever judgments it may inflict on us and our country. And if, for instance, by our contempt of true religion, we should open a way for popish superstition to overspread us, after a short preparatory reign of atheistical dissoluteness; if our abuses on all hands of the blessings of a free government should introduce upon us a slavery of our own creating; if the sinful excesses, that we have suffered wealth and plenty to lead us into, should bring on us, as they naturally do, poverty and distress; and our domestic enmities deliver us up to our common adversary: *who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem, or who shall bemoan thee; or who shall go aside to ask of thy peace* * ?

The common answer to all representations of this sort, is, that the world hath always been bad; and therefore we have no peculiar reason to fear. But if it hath been always a place of wickedness, it hath always been a place of misery too, by means of that wickedness. Continual efforts have been ever necessary to keep both from increasing. And if we, whom God hath treated with such distinguishing mercy, will not use these efforts, but abandon ourselves to sin; as he doth think fit to make some examples of his justice from time to time, what fitter example he can make, is hard to say.

Persons however will flatter themselves, that these, at the worst, are dangers of very distant times. And every single sinner in the world flatters himself in just the same manner. Yet the consequences of their sins do overtake men, and may overtake nations too, with surprising suddenness. And the sentence, recorded in Scripture, is perfectly just: *They of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come; and he prophesieth of times that are far off.*

* Jer. xv. 5.

Therefore shall none of my words be prolonged any more: but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God. And they shall know, that I am the Lord; and have not said in vain, that I would do this evil unto them* †.

Other persons there are, who acknowledge the prospect to be bad, and evil perhaps impending: but the only wise part in their opinion is, to let matters go as they will, and enjoy themselves as long as they can: why should they be uneasy before the time comes? Now if it were certain, that nothing could do good, this might be reasonable in a worldly view of things: but where every one may contribute, both by amending himself and awakening others, to prevent ruin; there to be indolent is as contrary to humanity, as it is to religion. And therefore the word of God hath taken severe notice of it, as a great crime: *Ye have seen the breaches of the city of David, that they are many:—And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts: Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts* ‡.

But even they, who are concerned for the public, may yet express that concern in a very faulty way. Many seem to think they have fully done their duty, as soon as they have been angry at those, whom they apprehend to have any way occasioned what is amiss: angry, perhaps at the wrong persons, perhaps in a wrong manner: such as only tends to increase guilt, and hasten mischief.

* Ezek. xii. 27, 28. † Ezek. vi. 10. ‡ Isa. xxii. 9. 12, 13, 14.

The first complaint, generally speaking, is of those in authority. And undoubtedly the people have a right to complain, whenever the common concern is administered ill. But then it should be considered, that we may, through ignorance or prejudice, expect from authority, either what it cannot do, or what is not fit to be done: we may expect more than is reasonable to expect from men like ourselves, though it be fit; and even supposing them very much to blame, we may conduct ourselves upon it so as to be equally or yet more to blame. Want of reverence to laws and superiors is one of our great evils: and all opposition to whatever is thought wrong, should be accompanied with the strictest care not to augment this evil. But our duty requires us peculiarly to beware of raising domestic uneasinesses too high, when a foreign enemy may take advantage of them: and at all times it requires us, to preserve most religiously the loyalty and honour due to the supreme power: especially now, when our present establishment is our only human hope of having all that is valuable to us secured to ourselves, and transmitted to our posterity.

Next to the rulers of a nation, its instructors are usually the great object of censure: and we acknowledge there is cause. We have not been so serious and religious, so zealous and diligent, so disinterested and humble, so mild and charitable, as we ought. The public must have suffered by this: we have suffered by it ourselves: and, unless we repent, we have ground to expect a yet fuller execution, than we have experienced already, of what heaven inflicted on our predecessors in the Jewish nation: *Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept*

*my ways**. Yet we cannot but hope, that a very considerable part of the accusations brought against us, would appear, upon enquiry, to be without foundation. But however that be, we must remind you, that our faults will be no excuse for your transgressions: and we earnestly beg, that they who complain we do not the good we ought, would at least not hinder, but give us opportunity, and assist us rather, to do both others and themselves the good we would.

But even they, who proceed from complaints to endeavours of amending things, will fail unhappily of their end, if they trust to worldly methods alone, and leave religion and virtue, the great support and cement of human society, out of their schemes. This will be merely palliating for a little while: and doing what the Scripture, in perfect conformity with plain reason, hath long ago condemned, as doing nothing. *Because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace: and one built up a wall, and others daubed it with untempered mortar: therefore thus saith the Lord God, I will rend it with a stormy wind, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundations thereof shall be discovered; and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof, and ye shall know that I am the Lord*†. Indeed every page of the prophetical writings recommends itself greatly to thinking persons, by the most forcible and convincing expressions of the utter inefficacy of every expedient for public good, that is not accompanied with true virtue and true piety.

These, therefore, it is our most important interest to restore and promote: to represent with earnest-

* Mal. ii. 9. † Ezek. xiii. 10—14.

ness, and yet with mildness, to such as are deficient in either, how wrong in itself, and how hurtful to the world, their conduct is: and to be zealous in doing our own duty, whether they will attend to theirs or not: persons of rank and influence, by setting an example worthy of imitation, and showing different regards to the good and the bad; persons intrusted with public power, by behaving in their several stations uprightly; parents and masters, by the prudent exercise of their private authority; and every one at least, by reforming himself. This, if it do nothing farther, will be securing his own happiness: and the more single reformations there are, the nearer will be our approach to an universal one. We are called indeed perpetually to repentance: but the present national call, if it be not hearkened to, will much aggravate the guilt, not only of the profane despisers of it, but those also, whose compliance with it is merely external; who dare to approach the Searcher of hearts, and mock him by saying to him, without sincerity, such things as we have joined in saying this day.

On the times appointed for confession of sins, it hath always been a rule, as the word of God plainly shews, for persons to abstain in a considerable degree from their usual food: not as thinking it a duty of any value in itself, for that were a superstitious imagination; and nothing can be more express against every superstition, than Scripture is: but partly to make an acknowledgment of more than ordinary solemnity, by their actions as well as words, of their unworthiness to partake of the common blessings of heaven; and chiefly to spend those hours in humility of spirit, and cool reflection for their future good, which they have spent too frequently in dangerous

levities, or sinful indulgences. It is not then the abstinence, it is not the outward humiliation, nor even the real seriousness of a day, which God requires of us; but that these things be made subservient to our lasting benefit: that preserving on our minds the impression of what we have said and heard here, we go home and retire into ourselves; think over our several duties, public and private, with respect to our Maker, our fellow creatures, and the regulation of our own hearts; and after renewing our applications for pardon and grace, set right, without delay, whatever hath been wrong: that we form resolutions to think often of our own conduct, to follow steadily the most effectual methods for preserving it such as we ought, and not to suffer the opinions and customs of an inconsiderate world, to wear out of our minds the regard we owe to the Author and end of our beings.

But besides these obligations, there is yet another, which particularly deserves our attention at this time; that when we ask mercy of God, we shew it to man. And accordingly the Scripture joins closely together fasting and giving alms; which therefore we should join too, each according to his ability: but always remembering, that no one part of our duty whatever will be accepted as an equivalent for transgressing any other; but we must *break off our sins by righteousness*, as well as *our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor* *, if ever we expect that our charity should avail towards procuring our pardon.

And now would we but employ the present solemnity, in determining conscientiously to practise these things: besides the good fruits, it could not fail to produce in each of us singly; we might hope, on very

* Dan. iv. 27.

just grounds, to experience nationally the same happy effects of it, which we read the Jews did, from making the same determination, upon hearing the admonition of the text. *They gathered themselves together, and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers. And they sware unto him with a loud voice: and all Judah rejoiced at the oath. For they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about* *.

* 2 Chron. xv. 10. 12. 14, 15.

SERMON II.

PREACHED ON A GENERAL FAST.

1 PET. V. 6.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

HUMILITY of heart and behaviour is a duty so deeply founded in the nature of man, that though we knew of no power above us, we ought yet to think modestly of ourselves, from a consciousness of our infirmities; and pay a mutual deference one to another, in proportion to the different pre-eminences, be they ever so small, by which we are severally distinguished. But the least apprehension of a perfect Being superintending us, must surely magnify beyond expression the sense, how very imperfect we are: and convince us, that the utmost reverence, of which we are capable, towards such a one, if such a one there be, will fall vastly short of what we owe. Now the existence of a powerful and wise, a just and good, Ruler of all, is at first sight a possible thing. And were we sure of no more, the notion is so respectable in itself, so beneficial to human society, and so peculiarly comfortable to every honest mind, that passing it over with a scornful neglect, instead of attending to it seriously, would be a haughtiness of spirit, blameworthy and shocking to a great degree.

But the reality of this notion is undeniably proved, by the plainest observations on every part of the universe, and the strictest inquiries into its general constitution: by the natural prepossessions of common men, the acutest reasonings of speculative men, and the most universal consent, that ever any invisible truth obtained, of all men. Yet farther, to leave no plea for ignorance of it, or of its consequences, the Creator hath made himself known to his creatures by express revelation: and declared, what he is, what he expects from them, and what he hath decreed concerning them. How monstrous a disposition of soul must it be then, that can pride itself in standing out against such evidence of such a doctrine: can take upon it to censure the works of the Almighty, without understanding a single part of them thoroughly; can triumph in the thought of an ungoverned and fatherless world, of wickedness unpunished, and virtue unrewarded; and hold those in utter contempt, who entertain better hopes!

Our nation affords, I fear, more than a few persons, guilty even of such pride against God, as this. But it affords multitudes of a sort, if possible, yet more unaccountable; who believe in him, and slight him. Acknowledging a sovereign Lord of the world, without standing in awe of him, is doubtless a most astonishing inconsistency: and yet I conceive it will appear, on enquiry, the main source of those great and many sins, for which we are met here to express our concern. Now if this be our case, a little reflection will shew it to be a very dangerous one: and the Apostle hath pointed out the only cure, that since, as the preceding verse teaches, *God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble*, we should *humble ourselves* unfeignedly *under his mighty hand*

which hath been, and is, in several respects, heavy on us; that so, instead of depressing us lower still, *he may exalt us* again *in due time.*

There are not many comparatively, but in their cooler hours at least, believe the Author of nature to be also the wise and just Lawgiver and Ruler of mankind. Nay, lamentable as the apostacy of our days hath been, the generality still entertain a persuasion, grounded on the firmest proofs, that he hath notified the conditions of eternal felicity by Jesus Christ. But, having this *knowledge of God,* do they *glorify him as God* * ? Do they pay any homage to him, do they cultivate any regard for him? Do they consider him as the giver of all good, to whom their thanks are due for every thing they enjoy; as the judge of the whole earth, who shall reward every one according to his works? Will they, in obedience to that reason, which he hath bestowed on them, resist their vicious appetites and passions: will they, on the authority of that revelation, which he hath superadded, receive any thing, but what they can see of themselves to be true; or do any thing, but what they can see of themselves to be requisite? Is it not indeed their stated practice to set their own inclinations and fancies above all his assertions and laws: disdaining to mind what is right or wrong, even when it relates to this life; and much more, to be swayed by the tendencies, which doctrines or precepts may have, to fit them for the happiness of another?

Nay, such as imagine themselves perhaps very steady believers, and sufficiently good Christians, do not many of them, though less professedly, and without distinctly seeing it, yet almost as effectually make their choice just as they like, in what things their

* Rom. i. 21.

Christianity shall consist; and what they will go on to think or practise, however plainly forbidden in any one's judgement but their own? Are they at all willing to seek, with serious humility, what the Gospel teaches? Are they withheld from any sin which it forbids, merely by the fear of their Lord and Master? Do they perform any duty which it enjoins, merely from love to their Redeemer? Try them but in one point. The sacred writings have repeatedly directed a regular attendance on public worship and instruction. Yet they neglect it perpetually, on pretences, for which they would neglect scarce any one thing besides: when they condescend to come they would usually be understood to do it as matter of prudence, or propriety, and compliance with custom; but by no means of obedience to God. And in general, they substitute the fashions and usages of what they call the world, that is, of the persons with whom they are pleased, and whom they desire to please, in the place of the divine commands. This wretched rule they follow against their consciences first: to this by degrees they bend their consciences afterwards: and when once they have accomplished that, they will not reflect, they will not hearken, they will not bear the mention of an argument or a hint to the contrary; but exclaim against it as absurd, before it can well be brought out; let reason or Scripture say what they will: till at last, not even yet renouncing their faith, they have hardly a single good impression from it left: no gratitude to God, no hope in him, no dread of him; no thought of themselves in earnest, as his creatures; nor any recollection, how profligate a treatment this is of our Maker, of our Saviour, of the Holy Spirit of grace. We do not know, I believe, nor suspect very often, how

inconsiderable God is become in our eyes, and how near advances we have made to what is in effect mere atheism. But we have cheated ourselves with disguises, and shifted between religion and irreligion, till we have no perception whereabout we are. And it is high time for us to fix, once for all, which we will stand to. For if the Almighty deserves any regard, he deserves a most dutiful and universal one. Will we therefore pay him that, or will we avow paying him none?

But were many of us, whose appearance is more decent, to be examined, what there is in us beyond appearance: were many, who have some inward restraints and pious feelings, questioned how far they extend; and if there be not mixed with them, a much less indeed, but still a very criminal neglect and contempt of the Supreme Being; what do we think the result would be? Were such to be asked, how often they pray to him in private, or whether they remember perhaps, when they did so last; with what attention they pray at such times, or whether hurrying over a set of unmeaning words contents them; what care they take in his house, that their hearts join in the things they say, or improve by those they hear; how often they meditate, as in the presence of God, on their duty, and their condition with regard to another life; whether in truth they almost ever think of a future state, as their principal concern, or have not inwardly chosen their portion here; whether they indulge no secret immorality, are chargeable with no injustice or unmercifulness; what expression, or what tincture, there is in their common conversation and behaviour, of a Christian spirit; what zeal they have, what expences they are at, what methods

they encourage, what pains they take, for promoting the present and eternal welfare of their fellow-creatures: how must they answer? Nobody hath a right, it may be, to put such questions to you: but surely they are very important ones for you to put to yourselves. And for God's sake do it: and press your souls home to make an honest reply. For if religion be any thing, these are most material things. Do you then find, that you have hitherto been, in relation to them, such persons as you ought? And if not, do you experience a proportionable concern for your failures? Are you even now resolved to become such? And will you remember and keep to what you resolve: or run away from your convictions to the first employment or amusement you can hope to lose them in, or however suffer them to wear out for want of being renewed; so after a while, neglect your Maker and his laws as much as ever; and possibly despise yourselves for having once, in a sort of fright, thought to do otherwise? If you relapse so far, your case will be a very dangerous, God grant it be not a desperate one.

Yet amongst all these blamable sorts of persons, there are many perhaps not ill-disposed, were they left to follow their own judgments quietly, towards becoming sincerely and throughout religious. But the world would wonder at them, their acquaintance would ridicule them: and that they cannot bear. But which is your God then? The world, or the Maker of it? And which is it fitter you should humble yourselves under? The rightful authority of the greatest and best of Beings; or the usurped tyranny of a few vain mortals, whose friendship means you no good, and whose enmity can do you no harm? But

so it is: we are cowardly one to another, and brave only against *him, who hath power to cast into hell* *.

Even the lowest part of mankind, they also now have learnt from their superiors to lift themselves up in defiance of the Most High: to plead openly and boldly for gratifications, expressly prohibited by his commandments; to prefer their diversions or their idleness before his worship; some of them to *sit in*, and others to surround *the seat of the scorner* †. For poor wretches, that know nothing else, imagine they know enough however to be above instruction in their duty, to contemn God's word, and scoff at his ministers.

Such is the condition, and I appeal to the observation of you all, alas! to the consciences of too many of you, if it be not daily more and more, if it be not, I had almost said, universally, the condition of the people of this land, especially this city. *Help, Lord: for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men* ‡.

But how great and general soever our transgressions have been; it will be alleged, that they cannot have arisen from a principle so very shocking as pride, directed against the Author of our beings, but from inconsiderate indulgence of less heinous, though still blame-worthy dispositions. But were there, and O that there were! much more room for this plea than there is, yet bare inconsiderateness and forgetfulness of God is, in no small degree, contempt of him. However, some offenders have not adventured on so direct impiety as others. And we ought to judge with all possible tenderness of every one's case, besides our own; but it concerns us beyond expression not to flatter ourselves in that. And we may

* Luke xii. 5. † Psalm i. 1. ‡ Psalm xii. 1.

discern with certainty the true state of it by this one mark. If want of thought hath occasioned our ill behaviour, we shall be thankful for admonition, and readily change our course: if pride, we shall be displeased with it, and tempted to go on. But whether we have disobeyed God wilfully or inadvertently, we have great cause to humble ourselves before him with deep contrition: and bewail our own personal guilt in the first place; then the sins of those, who make up the same community with us: for he cannot correct them, but we must suffer at the same time.

Now supposing we did not at all feel ourselves particularly under his mighty hand at present, yet surely we ought to recollect with great awe, that in reality we are under it always. His government of the world is without ceasing carried on, however silently, yet steadily and powerfully, to that one end, which a Being of perfect holiness must propose to himself ultimately, the manifestation of his glory, in the punishment of the wicked, and reward of the good. Were both to be entirely deferred till after death, as the chief part of both will, yet how near is that to us all; and how very near to many of us, who perhaps are the farthest of any from suspecting it! Though were it as distant as it can, yet the connection of it with eternal enjoyments or sufferings being as certain as that God is holy and true, the practical inference would be just the same, as if it were overtaking us this very moment. But indeed, unless we will absolutely shut our eyes, we must see judgments from above, both naturally flowing from our sins, and additionally inflicted on them, in the mean while.

All wickedness, by the righteous and wise appointment of Providence, in the ordinary course of things

produces misery: and the great restraint from all wickedness is the fear of God. While men continue to reverence him, there will always be some hold upon them, to keep them back from committing evil, or bring them back to repent of it. But when once that band is broken, which it is of late in this nation, beyond any other in the Christian, or perhaps the heathen world, slighter and weaker ties will soon give way one after another, till by degrees every thing is set loose. And how very fast accordingly our morals and our prudence have been forsaking us, ever since we have begun to forsake religion, and to find out that our Maker is unworthy of our notice, a little reflection will shew us too plainly, if indeed any be needful. Do we not see probity and integrity, friendliness and natural affection, visibly decayed? Persons of all ranks living above their ranks; and first distressing themselves and their families by vain and vicious expences, then descending to every baseness, that will enable them to proceed in this wrong way, and every folly that will drive away remorse for an hour, though by furnishing cause for its return with more bitterness than ever: crowding their whole time with absurd and dangerous diversions, and infected with a rage for pleasure and shew, be the consequences what they will, that hath taken possession of high and low, young and old, to a degree unknown before; and in many fears not, in some affects, to display itself, on the days set apart for the worship of God, nay for solemn penitence and humiliation? Do we not see almost every body treating the grossest and most pernicious immoralities, of what they gently style the gay kind, as no faults at all in one sex, and daily approaching nearer towards affording them open countenance in the other: mak-

ing on any occasion indeed very little distinction, though it be of unspeakable importance to make a great one, between good people and bad; or, to say the truth, rather inverting than laying claim to the Psalmist's character: *In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord* *. Do we not see them, educating their children, and managing their servants as if it were on purpose to have them wicked: plainly perceiving them to be miserable in consequence of it; perpetually involving themselves in grievous uneasinesses and difficulties from it, and making frequently heavy complaints of it; yet never once reflecting to purpose, whence it comes, or what would mend it: but stupidly acquiescing in what they have the nearest concern to prevent; and take it for granted, that such of necessity is to be the condition of their families, from one generation to another?

And if these fruits have sprung in private life from our disdain of piety, what must it have produced in public? Just what we were to expect from a number of such creatures put together: and from the fixed decree of Providence, that *they, who plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, shall reap the same* †. Rulers and magistrates having permitted the authority that ordained them, to sink, have, by a consequence, which they might easily have foreseen, lost their own: respect to every kind of superiors is worn out; and, next to the laws of Heaven, those of our country are regarded least. The nature of things, and the word of God, have made uprightness and industry the supports of society, and religion the support of them. But we have imagined we could do better than this: we have been laying other founda-

* Psalm xv. 4. † Job iv. 8.

tions, and bringing these into utter disesteem, as it were by consent on all sides; till they, who desire most to act upon principle, find, it may be feared, scarce any remainder of principle among us, left to act upon. We have *trusted in the staff of a broken reed, whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it* *. *We have forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and hewed us out broken cisterns, that can hold no water* †. We have indeed been worse than negligent, we have been jealous of religion; fearful, that bigotry, enthusiasm, superstition, and all manner of evils would flow from it: and so, without taking the least care to guard against them, or prevent the increase of that communion, in which they are most intimately mixed with it, piety in general hath been made the subject of invective and derision, till we are at present immersed in profaneness and profligateness; and, as extremes beget one another, directly in the road to be over-run after a while by popery, the schools of which are multiplying continually in our streets. We have thought the morals of our people totally undeserving of regard, unless it were to corrupt them, that we might enjoy *the public benefits of private vices:* and the consequence hath been, to say of others no more than hath been said, that our poor, the strength and riches of a nation when regulated well, are every where destroying themselves and their posterity by their intemperance and promiscuous lewdness; and becoming, in the mean time, an insupportable burthen by their idleness and extravagance. We have thought that neither God nor man were to restrain what we are pleased to call liberty; and thus we have plunged into a licentiousness, that hath brought upon us

* Isa. xxxvi. 6. † Jer. ii. 13.

many of the inconveniences, and almost all the discontent, of slavery.

Nor hath the Almighty omitted to superadd, though with a gentle hand, corrections entirely his own, to the sufferings, which we have chosen to inflict on ourselves by means of the stated connections, which he hath wisely and justly established. We had long been possessed of the blessing of peace, without making any one good use of it: and he hath permitted a war to come upon us, of which we foresee neither the duration nor the event. We had long enjoyed healthy and plentiful seasons, without acknowledging him for the giver of them: and we have since been visited with sickness in all our borders; and such dearth, as few, if any of us, ever knew before. *Our heavens have been made as brass, and our earth as iron* *; and we would not understand it to be a chastisement: *the former and the latter rain* † have been restored to us, and we have not owned it to be a mercy. Now, if lighter and shorter judgments will not awaken us, heavier and longer must. For so the prophet foretels: *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see* ‡. And how much greater evils God may yet cause us to see, lies hid in the treasures of his own foreknowledge. We are at present in a condition, that may, in various respects, very naturally and very soon become extremely dreadful. And what else we can do to better our prospect, is neither easy for any person to discover, nor indeed the concern of every person to inquire: but there is one thing, which alone of itself will do incredible good; and every thing besides, very little without it; which we all have in our power, and all feel to be our duty. *Come,*

* Deut. xxviii. 23. † Deut. xi. 14. Jer. v. 24. ‡ Isa. xxvi. 11.

and let us return unto the Lord our God: for he hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up *.

Both particulars and nations, which fall into a bad way, are strangely unwilling, for the most part, to understand the truth of their own case. Such was the disposition of God's ancient people, admirably described by the prophet Hosea: *His strength is devoured, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are upon him, and he knoweth it not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord, nor seek him, for all this* †. Nay, when the disease is much too notorious to be denied, persons will be ascribing it to other causes, and inventing other cures, than the right one; putting confidence in schemes unconnected with reformation, and perhaps mending bad with worse. But to these the Almighty himself hath expressly denounced: *Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; that cover with a covering, but one of my Spirit; that they may add sin to sin: that will not hear the law of the Lord: which say, Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore, thus saith the Holy one of Israel: Because ye despise this word, therefore this iniqulty shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant* ‡. Healing sores in a palliative, unsound manner, only occasions their bursting out again with more threatening symptoms. If therefore we would truly mend our case, we must go to the bottom of it. We have been wicked, and we must repent. We have despised God, and we must *humble ourselves under his mighty hand.*

* Hos. vi. 1. † Hos. vii. 9, 10. ‡ Isa. xxx. 1—13.

But then what shall we reckon is doing so? Is it merely appointing or observing a form of humiliation for form's sake? Instead of appeasing God, we shall not so much as deceive men by this: but only veil irreligion with transparent hypocrisy. Is it then being affected and warmed a little, at the time, by what we say or hear in this place; and becoming, almost immediately after, just the same persons that we were before? On the contrary, these transient fits of piety are mentioned in Scripture, as a very discouraging sign: *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away* *. While persons reflect not at all, one knows not how it may operate, if ever they come to reflect. But when, through the grace of God, they have actually been made sensible of their guilt and their danger, and yet relapse into it; when their convictions have been renewed, their good purposes repeated, and yet all suffered time after time, to fall back into nothing: what can be expected, but that Heaven will at last abandon those, who in so shameful a manner abandon themselves? Our present business therefore is, each of us to imprint on our minds now such deep sentiments, as may influence us ever after, that devoutly conforming our lives and our souls to the will of God, is the very end of our being: to recollect and confess before him, how grievously and how long both we in particular, and this nation in general, have neglected the obedience we owe him: to acknowledge, that we are altogether in his hands, as private persons and as a people; to consider whatever hath befallen us, as less than our iniquities have merited; to prepare ourselves with

* Hos. vi. 4.

meek resignation for whatever more he may please to inflict on us: yet earnestly petition him, that whatever becomes of our temporal concerns, *our spirits may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* *; and that if it be consistent with his holiness and wisdom, he would spare us even in this world, *not for our righteousness, but his own great mercies* †, in Christ our Redeemer, for the honour of his name, and the preservation of his true religion established amongst us; to form solemn resolutions against every sin, against every occasion of sin, for the future: begging at the same time that grace of our Sanctifier, which alone can make them effectual: and do all these things not only in profession, as matter of outward decency, but from the bottom of our souls; not only with a sudden fervour, excited here in the congregation, but deliberately at home, before *our Father which seeth in secret* ‡.

How easy, or how hard, it may be, for any of us to bring our hearts really into such a frame as this, He only knows, who knows all things. Perhaps it is a sort of language, and a way of thinking, to which some of us have never been used, and which others have long disused. If it be, we have so much the more need to take it up without delay. For our Maker and our Judge is entitled to the most lowly submissions from his guilty creatures: and there is neither any meanness in making, nor any greatness in refusing, them. In all cases, the just and the right is the worthy and the honourable behaviour. But in this, above all, it is the necessary one too. Obstinacy cannot support us: dissimulation will not conceal us: it is God we are concerned with, and our only resource is to throw ourselves on his mercy. The

* 1 Cor. v. 5. † Dan. ix. 18. ‡ Matt. vi. 6.

very best of us have cause to lament our failings, to reiterate our vows, to implore his forgiveness and assistance, yet more ardently than we have done. In proportion to our transgressions and deficiencies; our self-abasement, our penitence, our supplications, our efforts of amendment, ought to increase. And that our performance of these obligations will be followed, bad as our state is, with the happiest consequences, reason affords comfortable hope, the whole tenor of Scripture expressly declares, and the text with peculiar strength implies: *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*

But I must not now enter on the illustration and proof of this important connection. May our present humiliation give an experimental proof of it, by effectually inclining us to *be reconciled to God**; and inducing Him to direct our public counsels into the way of national prosperity, and our private conduct into that of eternal blessedness.

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

SERMON III.

PREACHED ON A GENERAL FAST.

1 PET. V. 6.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

At our last meeting on the same most necessary occasion, which calls us together now, I endeavoured to lay before you, from these words, both the general duty of man's *walking humbly with his God* *, and the particular reasons, which we of this nation have, for exercising a very deep humility towards him, as we have been particularly guilty, besides various other sins, of that unspeakable shocking one, pride against him. Too many amongst us have dared to treat the faith, if not of his being, yet of the only thing which makes it valuable, a just and good Providence, with utter contempt: absurd as it is, that the wise and powerful Maker of the world should not be the ruler of it, and that the Ruler of the world should not *reward every one according to his works* †. Much greater numbers, if they do not deny his moral government, yet almost entirely disregard it: attend on his public worship but seldom, and then visibly as matter of mere external decency; never condescend to pay him any homage in private; nor through their whole behaviour consider him, in the least, as, what they

* Mic. vi. 8. † Matt. xvi. 27.

profess to acknowledge he is, the lawgiver, the inspector and judge, of their lives and hearts: but securely follow passion, appetite, custom, fancy, as the guide of their conduct; and openly ridicule those that do otherwise; call themselves Christians perhaps, but are totally void of reverence for every doctrine of Christianity that is above their comprehension, for every precept that contradicts their inclination; and strangely negligent even of natural piety and social virtue. Larger multitudes yet imagine, that they are mighty religious persons, if they preserve but a tolerable regularity in the outward acts of devotion, justice, and temperance: though not proceeding from any inward principle of love and duty to God, not accompanied by any sense of their needing his pardon through the blessed Jesus, or his help through the influences of the Holy Spirit; not carried on to an uniform habit either of obedience or resignation, or animated by the hopes of a better world. Indeed they most commonly live, and often die, as unconcerned about his future disposal of them, as if it were not a matter of moment at all, instead of being the only real one that belongs to our condition.

But, if possible, we have slighted him still more, considered as a people, than separately. We have enjoyed the greatest national blessings, without the least national thankfulness for them. In particular he hath blessed us with the clearest knowledge of the several obligations incumbent on us: and we have shewn the most absolute scorn of all methods for promoting or securing the practice of them, even in those points, on which our public welfare most confessedly depends. Nor have we hitherto received the warnings, or even the corrections of the Almighty,

which have begun to overtake us, with more respect, than his mercies. You have just heard the case of the barren fig-tree read in the Gospel for the day: *Behold, these three years I come, seeking fruit, and find none: cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground* * ? Brethren, what is our case? The present is the fifth year that we have professed to observe a solemn fast, on account of our sins and our dangers, without making the least reformation in any single article. Nay, we have continually increased in neglect of religion, in gaiety and madness for pleasure: till we are come to pursue our diversions openly on the most sacred day of the week; and some (for, in every instance, while the offence is renewed, the complaint must) cannot persuade themselves to abstain from them, or from inviting large companies of others to join in them, even on these anniversaries of peculiar humiliation.

Such outrages on piety and common decency as these, must when repeated after notice taken of them, and warning given against them, which hath been faithfully done by the ministers of God's word, be deemed premeditated insults, not inadvertence and forgetfulness. Yet forgetfulness of the Most High can never be a slight offence: and is greatly aggravated by the strong admonitions to remember him, which not only his holy word and our consciences, would we hearken to them, give us perpetually, but his Providence also hath given us of late. The natural consequences, and superadded punishments of our disregard to him, have appeared very plainly for some time, and are daily becoming more visible and sensible, in the sins, and follies, and distresses of private life, in the general want of public order and

* Luke xiii. 7.

public spirit, in burthens and uneasinesses; in threatenings and actual attempts from abroad to deprive us of the liberty we have abused, and the religion we have scorned; and sink us down into the slavery, and superstition, and wretchedness, that we have deserved to feel. Hitherto, indeed, the storm hath not fallen upon us: but it still hangs over us more heavily, than most of us have ever known: our efforts to dispel it have succeeded very imperfectly: the difficulty of renewing those efforts must be augmenting each year: our enemies are multiplied in a dreadful manner: and what assistance we may expect from our friends, God only knows. One thing, indeed, may afford some consolation to us. We have manifested, on occasion of our danger, an universal zeal for that establishment, which is the only human means of preserving us from it. Had we failed in our loyalty, we had completed our wickedness: and should any temptation hereafter entice or provoke us to fail in it, we and our posterity are entirely undone. But there can be no sure dependence on their dutifulness to their king, who are undutiful to their God: or on their attachment to the common interest of the society, who prefer every present gratification to their own everlasting welfare. Or if there could; a profane and wicked people will never have equal spirit in defence of the community, for they have not equal motives to it, with a pious and virtuous one. Or supposing their courage ever so great: their wealth, their strength, their union, their assiduity, their observance of rules, their mutual confidence, will be less: and those vices, which have brought us already so far on our way towards ruin, must at length, if we persist in them, bring us to it, merely by producing their natural effects.

But could we have hopes of escaping these, the honour of the divine government is concerned not to let a national contempt of it go unpunished, even in this world; and all reliance on human wisdom and power, without regard to God, will prove in the end fatal self-deceit. *When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall stumble, and he that is holpen shall fall down: they shall all fail together* *. *The anger of the Lord shall not return, till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly* †.

But surely then we had much better consider it *in this our day* ‡; and, as another text awfully exhorts, *give glory to the Lord our God, before he cause darkness: and while we look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death* §. Too many, of all ranks, will probably slight whatever of this kind is said, even from Scripture itself. But still our commission is: *Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel; to a rebellious nation, that hath rebelled against me, they and their fathers unto this very day: and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; and thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear* ‖. Men in power and high stations more especially, and they who aspire to them no less, have always been disposed to look with great disdain on the artless and unwelcome directions, which religion suggests for deliverance from danger. They have more refined contrivances, on which they rest; and scorn the plain methods of reconciliation to God, and trust in him, through our blessed Redeemer, as fitted only for the populace to hearken to. But the Scripture hath provided an alarming denunciation

* Isa. xxxi. 3. † Jer. xxiii. 20. ‡ Luke xix. 42.
§ Jer. xiii. 16. ‖ Ezek. ii. 3, 4. 7.

against them in particular. *Hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth, shall not make haste* *. *Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong* †. Another sort of persons, extremely apt to despise the thought of reformation, indeed all serious thought whatever, are they who abandon themselves to indolence and voluptuousness, and the study of luxurious elegance and delicacy. But for these likewise there is in the treasury of the prophets a menace in store, which contains, alas! much too exact a description of our own times. *Wo unto them that are at ease in Zion, that put far away the evil day, that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall,* (the luxury of the table had then made but a small progress) *that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, that drink wine in bowls, and perfume themselves*

* Or, be ashamed. See Rom. ix. 33. x. 11.

† Isa. xxviii. 14—18. 22.

with the chief perfumes *, *but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and their banquet shall be removed* †. Others again are by no means indifferent about the storm, which they see gathering; but have no belief, that amendment, or any thing, can disperse it: and therefore will take no pains in what they conceive will produce no good. But at least to themselves amendment will produce the greatest good: and resolutions not to amend, will bring both upon them and others, more certain and speedy, and total destruction; which else, after all, may perhaps be avoided. For hear the declaration of God in this case. *Now therefore speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you; return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things. I will scatter them, as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity* ‡.

So that, whether it be confidence, or despair, that hinders reformation, the threatenings, you see, are the same. And the full execution of these threatenings, together with the cause of it, is thus recorded in the Book of Chronicles. *The Lord God of their*

* In our translation it is, Anoint themselves with the chief ointments. But this, though literal, gives a different idea now from what it did then.

† Amos vi. 1. 3—7.

‡ Jer. xviii. 11, 12, 13. 17.

fathers sent to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of God arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young or old: he gave them all into his hand *.

How near we have approached to them in our guilt, is too visible: how easily we may come to resemble them in our punishment, is not less so. The hand of God is plainly lifted up over us: the only question is, Will we *humble ourselves under it*, or will we not? Will we yet acknowledge, that He is the sovereign of the world, and obeying him the only way to prosper? Will we yet *seek him while he may be found* †; confess our sins, change our conduct, and petition for his mercy? There have been circumstances, in which repentance itself would not stop the course of temporal punishments, though it will always prevent eternal ones: in which God hath said to his prophets, *Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence* ‡. Even to this extremity we may reduce ourselves: but that we are already in it, no way appears. The general rule of his providence is, *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will*

* 2 Chr. xxxvi. 15, 16, 17. † Isaiah lv. 6.
‡ Jer. xiv. 11, 12.

repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them *. And it ought to be our persuasion, that we are within the rule. Our cause is unquestionably good: and though we have been, most of us, lamentably wicked, yet through his grace many have preserved their integrity; and either for their sake, or his mercies' sake, we still enjoy great blessings. He hath been far from forsaking us, to the degree that we have forsaken him; else our state were wretched indeed: and would we but now *humble ourselves,* throughly *under his mighty hand,* there is no room to doubt, but *he would exalt us in due time.*

Whenever he calls upon us to use the instrument, he surely designs us to attain the end, for which it was formed. Now penitent reformation is the natural, as well as the appointed instrument for exalting both particular persons and communities. Religion works indeed by terror at first, and lowers the high spirits of the guilty: but only to raise them again on solid grounds, instead of the treacherous props which kept them up before. Without it, there is no dignity in the condition of man: and how should there be any expected in his deportment? If persons either believe not in one, who sees and rewards, or cannot hope that he will reward good to them: if all that they promise themselves be here, and they apprehend, that neither annihilation or misery awaits them hereafter; they will of course be many of them dangerous and mischievous, the generality of them base and vile, attend solely to the indulgence of their fancies and their senses, *eat and drink, for to-morrow they die* †. Or if any sparks of worth do remain, unextinguished by such a mean way of thinking, they will have only an occasional

* Jer. xviii. 7, 8. † 1 Cor. xv. 32.

and partial influence. Or could it, in some few, be a constant and uniform one, yet they will be very few: and the body of a people, if they are without conscience towards God, will be without honour and probity towards men, without prudence and magnanimity in the conduct of themselves, profligate and despicable in all respects. But on the contrary, true religion, for I speak not of superstitious persuasions and observances, true religion places men above sordid interests, low pleasures, and worldly anxieties: teaches them to dread nothing, but offending their Maker; to set their hearts on nothing, but pleasing him; and to have no conception of pleasing him by any other means, than rational piety and genuine virtue: it excites them by the noblest of motives to whatever is useful and estimable; and restrains them by the strongest terrors from whatever is bad and hurtful: obliges them to right behaviour in the highest prosperity, and supports them in it under the heaviest adversities: inspires men with the most earnest concern for doing their duty; and frees them from all concern about the consequences of it in this world, by presenting to their view the endless recompenses of a better. Such, in some degree, is the influence even of natural religion: but unspeakably more powerful will that be found, *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature* *.

Then farther, the sentiments, which thus dignify every one's behaviour singly, must have the same influence upon all, considered as forming a community. Public welfare will never be consulted as it ought, while men act merely on separate selfish bottoms: nor ever fail to be consulted, when a well-founded

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

faith in God animates their zeal for general good. Slights and provocations, difficulties and risks, private advantages, and party or personal attachments, may very easily sway and bias all, that act from temporal motives: but are nothing to such as act from this; the only one that cannot possibly be at any time overbalanced. So long as the state of affairs is calm indeed, government may go on very smoothly, without much principle in those who are employed by it, or live under it: perhaps the more smoothly for a while, in some cases, the less principle there is. But when storms rise, as after such calms they will rise, then is the time to see, in what the real strength of society consists: who will struggle, who will hazard, who will be faithful to the last. They, that fear God, certainly will: and we can have no certainty (how should we?) of any other. Amongst the truly religious, because they are such, there will be secure and mutual trust, faithful economy, and unwearied application: their counsels will be steady, their undertakings just, their execution bold, their confidence in Heaven strong, and their adherence to a righteous cause unmovable. Seldom, if ever, will a state, which proceeds in this manner, fail of success. And were they to fail ever so greatly, nay, to be overwhelmed ever so entirely, they would fall with more reputation and more happiness, than others flourish. But there is always reason for better hopes. A nation, reverencing the Sovereign of the universe, will be reverenced by all around them, as *a wise and understanding people, which hath the Lord nigh unto them* *. Their friends will know, they can depend on them: their enemies will know, they have the utmost efforts to fear from

* Deut. iv. 6, 7.

them: both will know, and they themselves too, that even in their last extremity, Providence may be expected to fight for them. *Great are the troubles of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. The Lord delivereth the souls of his servants: and they, that put their trust in him, shall not be destitute* *.

But then it must be observed, that such as have long been sinners, and are at last become penitent, (the former is certainly our case, would to God the latter were!) if relief doth not appear immediately, ought to wait for it with much patience, and be well satisfied if they are *exalted in due time:* in God's time, not their own. Wickedness ruins nations by degrees: reformation may restore them by degrees. An imperfect reformation will be likely to bring forth but imperfect fruits. And the completest reformation of a few may prove insufficient to save the whole. Still these are reasons, only why all should repent: not why none should, unless all will, which it is impossible to foresee. For be the generality ever so incorrigible, and their destruction ever so absolutely decreed on that account; there is encouragement enough, notwithstanding, for those who do humble themselves, and return to a better mind. *Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment. It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger* †. At least, whatever such may suffer in common with others, far from being a mark of his anger towards them, will contribute largely to improve their virtues, and increase their future reward. So that in every event they may *cast all their care on God, for he careth for them* ‡. Undoubtedly they will feel the uneasiness,

* Psal. xxiv. 20. 22. † Zeph. ii. 3. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 7.

which human nature must from whatever is painful to it: and in particular, a tender concern for multitudes, who have none for themselves. But still they will submit with composedness and reverent approbation to the severest sentences of Heaven; and reflect with joy, that their chief interest is safe, though inferior comforts be lost.

Let us therefore *acquaint ourselves with God, and be at peace* * : *for he will keep those in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him* †. Whoever they are, that, sensible of their offences and their weakness, apply for the pardon obtained by Jesus Christ, and the grace communicated by the Holy Spirit: who, in their private capacity, honour God, study to be harmless and useful amongst men, and govern themselves by the rules of virtue; who also, in their public capacity, earnestly *pray for* and impartially seek the *peace of Jerusalem* ‡, the welfare of their country, civil and religious; not led by interest, resentment, or vanity, but having at heart real common good; and in their whole conduct encourage and restrain themselves as the case requires, by the faith of a future recompense: whatever may befall the society of which they are part, it shall be well with them. Whatever else they may undergo, others will have nothing to reproach them with, they will have nothing to reproach their own souls with; and *in the darkness light shall arise unto them* §. All such persons therefore, after doing conscientiously what is incumbent on them, not only may, but ought to be without solicitude: and should let the foundation of their peace be known; that all around them may perceive, how vastly preferable the consolations of

* Job xxii. 21. † Isaiah xxvi. 3.
‡ Psalm cxxii. 6. § Psalm cxii. 4.

religion are to every other method of making themselves easy. The pious man doth not labour to quiet his thoughts by obstinately shutting his eyes, or plunging into excesses, or taking off his attention by amusements: but can with tranquillity look towards the evil day, and see it coming: wait for it, and bear his share of it, less or greater; being assured, that *all things work together for his good* *. A very different state from theirs, who know they have deserved the judgments of God, who know they have contributed to bring them down to their own and others' hands; who have nothing to cheer them, when the clouds gather on every side of them; nothing to direct them, when the blackest tempest pours upon them, but the momentary glimmerings of human hope, struck out by their own imaginations; and if they should escape, if they should outwardly prosper again for the present, will only be tempted by it to *treasure up to themselves* hotter *wrath against the day of wrath* †, and final judgment. But hear, I intreat you, how the word of God expresses the case of each: and may its enlivening exhortation to the former, and its terrifying admonition to the latter, sink deep into your breasts! *Who is among you, fearing the Lord, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold all ye that kindle a fire, and compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled: this shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow* ‡.

* Rom. viii. 28. † Rom. ii. 5. ‡ Psalm l. 10, 11.

SERMON IV.

PREACHED ON OCCASION OF THE REBELLION IN SCOTLAND IN 1745.

2 SAM. X. 12.

Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth him good.

MANY of you, I hope, remember, that I discoursed to you upon these words, a year and seven months ago*: when God, for our sins, threatened us first, with what for the continuance of them, he hath at length permitted to fall on part of this land. The renewal and nearer approach, of the same danger, requires a more earnest inculcating of the same exhortations. For perhaps we may now lay to heart the things we did not then. It is very true the pulpit ought never to be profaned, and I trust never hath or shall by me, to serve the purposes of party-interest; or intermeddle with any points of a political nature, about which the friends of their country, that think at all, can possibly be of different opinions. But the present is a common cause, affecting every one of us, without distinction, in what is most important to us: and God forbid, that the ministers of the Gospel should be either unwilling

* February 26, 1743-4.

or afraid to speak, when his providence calls on them so loudly, to lift up their voice. Should the storm, which is now beating on many of our fellow-subjects, be dispersed by Infinite Goodness ever so soon and so entirely, without reaching us; it may yet be of unspeakable use, to have made the proper reflections and resolutions, whilst it was approaching towards us. And should the Almighty suffer us to feel it, as we have well deserved; nothing, but thinking and behaving rightly under his judgments, can give us hope of his mercy to moderate and shorten them.

Now whatever is requisite for these ends, is clearly comprehended in the words of the text: which bring naturally to our thoughts the three following particulars.

I. The interests we have at stake. *Our people, and the cities of our God.*

II. The spirit, which we ought to show in defending them. *Be of good courage, and let us play the men.*

III. The humble dependance on Heaven, which we ought to exercise at the same time. *And the Lord do that which seemeth him good.*

I. The interests we have at stake. *Our people, and the cities of our God:* in other words, our civil rights, and our religion.

The defence of their persons and possessions against lawless power, and the secure enjoyment of the means of happiness here and hereafter, were the great motives, that induced men to submit originally to government. And every particular government is good or bad, as it answers or fails of answering these purposes. Now in our own, as it stands at present, our liberties are greater than those of any other

nation upon earth: we enjoy them so fully, that we abuse them beyond example: and, I believe, no one person amongst us, of knowledge and consideration, doth or can suspect our king of having the least design to infringe any branch of them. The private property of the very meanest is as safe from the violence and oppression of the greatest, as good laws and an impartial execution of them can be hoped to make it. And for the public burthens we labour under, we have laid them on ourselves, by representatives of our own choice, for uses, which we and our fathers, very justly in the main, thought necessary: in particular for the most important use, of securing the nation, from time to time, against the mischief that now once more hangs over us: which if we at last get rid of, all we have spent is well laid out; and if we submit to, all is thrown away.

Still, there may doubtless have been faults committed, in relation both to these and other matters. But then, part of the faults commonly charged may be imaginary: for we are all as fallible, as those whom we blame; and few of us in so good a situation for judging. Part may be of small consequence; and therefore no ground for any great resentment. Part may have arisen from our own misconduct, as much, if not more, than from that of our superiors. Part again may have proceeded from excusable mistakes or infirmities of theirs; for which, as we need allowance in ourselves, we should make allowance in others: especially in princes, for the same reason as in parents; and to a fit degree, in those also that are employed by them. But whencesoever apprehended grievances may have come, we have legal, constitutional, peaceable means for redressing them; with uncontrolled liberty to use those means,

if we will. And suppose they have not operated so speedily, or so effectually, as we may wish: yet, if force may be used instead of them, upon every failure or delay, especially when caused merely by difference of opinions amongst ourselves, no society can ever subsist. And if we are too corrupt a people to expect any good from mutual persuasion; much less can we expect it from mutual violence.

Then lastly, as for our religion; the least valued, I fear, yet infinitely the most valuable of all our blessings; and which guards and fences the rest, in a manner that nothing else can: our religion, I say, is undeniably the most rational and worthy of God, the most humane and beneficial to men, the furthest from being either tyrannical or burdensome, the freest from superstition, enthusiasm, and gloominess of any in the world. It is established with such care, that the support of it is inseparable from that of the civil government: yet happily with such moderation, as to bear hard on none who dissent from it. The practice of it indeed, we must own, hath not been enforced on its professors, so generally or so carefully as it ought, either by the authority or the example of those, whose duty it is. Would to God it had! God grant it may! But still, they who have not duly excited men to piety, have not restrained them from it: and every one's disregard to it is principally chargeable on himself alone.

This I apprehend to be a true and a modest account of our present condition: for I have put the advantages of it at the lowest, in order to say nothing that can be disputed. And what are we to change it for, if the attempt, now making, should succeed? Indeed what have we to expect before it can succeed, (for every one must be convinced, that it will not be

tamely submitted to), but a wide and horrid view, in proportion as it makes a progress, of bloodshed in the field and out of it, and of ravage at the pleasure of a rude and uncivilized people, to the imminent hazard of every thing, and every person, dear to us? Judgments, which this island hath been long without experiencing: but how long, and heavily it may groan under them now, unless a speedy check be given to this rebellion, God only knows. For a conquering enemy, had he the will, which is dreadful to trust to, hath often not the power of restraining the desolations of fire and sword, when once they are begun.

But suppose this beginning of sorrows over: what must follow?

With regard to our civil concerns: how large numbers are there, who have no other security for a considerable part, it may be the most, or the whole of their property, than the continuance of the government now in being; in whose hands it actually is? And should that government fail: as it cannot be hoped, that what hath been lent for its support, and proved one of its main supports, will be regarded very favourably by those who come to overturn it; how terrible may the distresses of such persons be, and how much farther than themselves must they extend? To all their domestics, all their dependants, all that have dealings or concerns with them. What multitudes are there again, whose fortunes are entirely, or principally, built on royal grants, judicial determinations, or acts of the legislature, made within the last six-and-fifty years? which, in case of a change, will all become questionable, as done by incompetent authority, and lie at the mercy of we know not whom. The person, who now threatens us, comes attended

with a large and an indigent train of followers, collected from each of the three nations, who will think, and do their utmost to make him think, that the long sufferings of many of them, and the present dangerous services of many more, can never be rewarded with sufficient bounty. And when revenge, and poverty, and avarice, are set on work together, what forfeitures may be claimed, what misdemeanors and treasons charged, in a nation, which will be looked on as the whole of it involved in treason, for so many years past; or how unfairly the plainest laws in our favour may be interpreted to admit of such attempts, or even wrested to serve them; which of us all can so much as guess, or who can be assured of his own safety?

But besides these hazards to the properties and the lives of particular persons, in what state will the commerce and possessions of the nation be? Think, what innumerable debts the pretender to his majesty's crown must needs have contracted in so long a space, during which he hath had nothing of his own to subsist on: think, what immense sums foreign princes may charge on account of most expensive wars, which they may plead were begun or carried on for his service: and how dreadfully this nation may be exhausted, to satisfy but a small part of these demands: for which it will make no amends, to annihilate the present incumbrances on our public revenues, by a ruinous breach of the public faith. Think also, once more, what fatal concessions the powers who support the present invasion, and who will be wanted for a continual support, even were it to succeed; what fatal concessions they will assuredly require in return, of places on which our trade depends,

of indulgences in trade to themselves, of restrictions upon us; which will reduce us to a condition impotent, precarious, and despicable.

I say not this, or any thing, to raise in you a spirit of unchristian bitterness, either against the ignorant wretches that have been deluded into this rebellion, or even against their leaders. Let them be judged with all the charity, let them be treated with all the mercy, which their case will possibly allow: only let us see the mischief, that their success would bring on us, and exert ourselves accordingly to prevent it.

But were we ever so safe in other respects: what security can we have with respect to our happy, envied, legal constitution; when that power of suspending and dispensing with laws, and levying money without law, which lays every provision, that can be made in favour of the subject, wholly at the sovereign's feet; and yet was not only claimed, but exercised immediately before the Revolution, should come of course to be established as a just prerogative, by what will be called a Restoration? The rights, that we have enjoyed as indisputably our own, from that time to this, may then be accounted seditious and treasonable pretences; and every expression of fondness for any remain of liberty, be deemed a step towards rebellion: as indeed it will be thought but natural, to suspect and stifle the least breathing of that spirit which once delivered us, in order to prevent another change. Efforts notwithstanding will, in all likelihood, be made towards one: how bloody and how fatal, who can tell? The apprehension of these efforts will be a much stronger plea, than in the late king James's time, for keeping up a chargeable and dangerous standing force, perhaps a foreign one. The dread of that force will intimidate some; and

the principle of turning to their own advantage what they cannot help, will entice others, to go every length of compliance that they are required. And a prince, coming in on the bottom of right hereditary and indefeasible, will think he hath the clearest title to absolute power. His partizans, even whilst he is out of possession, have openly avowed that he hath: and what can be expected then, if he should get into it! The mere exercise of such a power very probably will not satisfy: but declarations and oaths be invented for the acknowledgment and support of it; which, it will be impossible for us, either to make with innocence, or to refuse with safety.

Then for the state of our religion: no one instance can be given, that Popery ever spared Protestantism for any continuance, after it was able safely to oppress it. But least of all will favour be shewn here, longer than necessity obliges. For, to whatever tenderness many of that communion may be inclined; as, no doubt, there are numbers amongst them of mild and worthy persons: yet the uncharitable part will assuredly prevail, as they always have done every where; and falsely imputing to our religion that pretended disloyalty, which proceeded only from their illegal attempts to overturn the whole constitution, will not fail to argue, that the same cause must produce again the same effect, and therefore must not be permitted to subsist. Think then, all that love the Church of England, all that believe the doctrines of the Reformation to be the truth of Christ, what a condition it will be, either to profess and practise the falsehoods and impieties, of which you are so thoroughly convinced, or to be driven from this, and every other place of God's public worship, into corners; nay, in a while, to be dragged out

thence also, and sacrificed to that *mother of abominations*, which hath so long been *drunken with the blood of the saints* *.

And let even them who are indifferent, or doubters, or unbelievers in religion, reflect on this at least: that, as they are always inveighing against superstition, so the church of Rome is over-run with it to the highest degree possible: and, as they are always exclaiming against the wealth and the power of ecclesiastics; so the wealth and the power, the pride and the tyranny of popery, are unspeakably the greatest, that ever the world knew. And if they will notwithstanding go at present upon their favourite maxim, that all religions are the same, it will be a just judgment of God to make them feel the difference.

But to these things it may be answered, that the most solemn obligations have unquestionably been entered into, by him who claims the crown, for our entire security, both in Church and State. Nor indeed could any thing seem in speculation more likely: because nothing is more apparently requisite in all common policy. And yet, surprising as it is, no one clear and explicit declaration of this kind was made by the Pretender at the time of the last rebellion: nor can I hear of any made by him at present. And I beg you to consider, if he will not promise plainly now, what will he do afterwards? For as to any good words, given by another in his name, what can be easier for him, than to disavow them, as going beyond the commission which he granted? But suppose the strongest assurances given by himself: were they not given by the bloody queen Mary to her protestant subjects, who had fully merited them by their zeal for raising her to the throne?

* Rev. xvii. 5, 6.

And did she not persecute them immediately, and burn them in little more than a twelvemonth? Were they not given by the late king James? And had he not strong motives of gratitude, as well as conscience, to keep them? And yet did he keep them for the smallest part of four years? How can we then flatter ourselves, that any one who claims under him, will be at all more favourable to that religion, and those liberties, which have been all this time the capital enemies to his pretensions? The most formal declarations, that he can make, have been over and over, and long since the Revolution, declared by the authority of the see of Rome, "utterly null and void from "the beginning, whenever they are prejudicial, in "any manner, and the least degree" (I use the very words of pope Clement XI. in the very case of stipulations made in favour of protestants) "to the Ca-"tholic faith, the salvation of souls, or to any rights "of the church whatsoever; even though such en-"gagements have been often ratified, and confirmed "by oath *." Let therefore the Pretender to the crown make promises ever so full and expressive, let his natural dispositions to keep them be ever so favourable; yet, as he professes subjection of conscience to the pope's determinations, under whose eye he hath long resided, in whose dominions his son, who hath now invaded us, was born and educated, and by whose bounty they have both been all along supported; he cannot refuse to break any ties, which shall be declared sinful by his infallible guide; who may purposely have connived at his engaging in them, in order to his breaking them at a proper time. But if he were to refuse it; can we imagine,

* Clem. XI. Pont. Max. Epist. et Brevia, fol. Romæ, 1724. tom. ii. p. 179.

that all his successors too will be so obstinately undutiful, as to spare a religion which they mortally hate, when they believe extirpating it will entitle them to heaven, and atone for all the sins of a wicked life?

It must be acknowledged, popery hath appeared milder of late, than in former ages. Yet even our days have known the executions of Thorn, and the banishments of Saltzburg: and France, this very year, hath been persecuting and murdering our protestant brethren for the profession of their faith. Nor hath the church of Rome ever given up any one of the claims, which it may have forborne to exercise: and should it once regain so much of its ancient power, as would necessary follow from prevailing here, it would soon resume its ancient fierceness in proportion.

Shall we persuade ourselves then, that fear will restrain a popish prince from attempting to overturn our religion and laws? But what if his greatest fear should be that of damnation for not attempting it? which was the known case of king James, and may be that of others after him. Or what if it should be held the safest way, in a political view, to make thorough work at once, by the assistance of foreigners, now preparing to invade us?

Still it may be said, that whoever becomes our king, will at least, for his own interest, be careful of the trade and power of the nation. But how can he, if he would; when he must undoubtedly have promised the contrary to foreign powers already? And if he is capable of deceiving them, how shall we trust him? But supposing he hath promised them nothing: yet, if he prevails by their help, what can he be else, than a deputy and a

viceroy, subject to the commands of our most formidable adversaries?

This consideration ought in reason to alarm even those who wish well to his cause, even those who profess his religion; and make them utter enemies to his coming in such a manner, however desirous they may be of his coming otherwise. For can we, or can they, make terms with the power of France, when we have once given it a footing in the heart of our country; or hope, that any terms, which are made, will ever be observed? Will that most ambitious and perfidious crown lose such an opportunity of weakening us by our own strength, making us dependent on itself for ever, and tools to enslave the rest of Europe? Will it not treat both us, and the king it sets over us, as the tyrant of Babylon did the prince, whom he gave to the Jews? *He hath made a covenant with him, and taken an oath of him; he hath taken also the mighty of the land; that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift up itself; but that by the keeping of his covenant it might stand* *.

Such then being the view of our dangers, let us proceed to consider,

II. The spirit, with which we ought to defend ourselves against them. *Let us be of good courage, and play the men.* These words may seem to express the duty of the soldiery alone. And, without question, they express that peculiarly: and, joined with the following ones, clearly shew, that a strong sense of religion, and a virtuous concern for the common welfare, are the two principles, that will give military persons bravery and success; as they did to those, whose history the text relates. But still the more literal translation is, *Be strong, and let us*

* Ezek. xvii. 13, 14.

strengthen one another *. In this sense they concern us all: this therefore I shall follow.

And if ever cause required exerting and joining all the strength, and all the courage we have, this is that cause. For the attack is made by our enemies, foreign and domestic at once, on every thing dear to us, civil and sacred: and conscience towards God, as well as private interest and public good, demands our utmost zeal in such a contest.

The plea, which some would use to check this ardour, as if the government we live under ought not to be supported, because the late king James and his son were set aside by the people, is absolutely groundless. For indeed king James set himself aside; abandoned the government wilfully, rather than administer it according to law: and by so doing, left the nation at liberty, or rather under necessity, to provide for itself in the manner it did; especially as he carried away the person, whom he called his son, along with him. And had he not been carried away; all the world knows, it was generally and strongly suspected, that he was not the queen's child: and the three estates of the kingdom, the only fit judges of a doubtful succession, fixed it without taking notice of him. But had none of these things been so; that unhappy king, seduced by Romish bigots, had invaded, with a high hand, the religious and civil rights of his people: instead of giving the least hope of amendment, he was going on with rapidity to the utter destruction of both. And subjects were not made for princes, to be treated as their absolute property, and descend from one to another like cattle, let them be used as they will: but princes were made for their subjects; to govern them legally,

* See Gen. xxv. 22. xli. 2. 2 Kings xiv. 8. 11.

and seek their good. What is the duty of the one, is the right of the other: and where there is a right, there ought to be a remedy. Common remedies are ever to be used in common cases: and if they are insufficient, single persons ought to bear every thing; and nations, every thing that can be borne without destruction; rather than break the public peace, and established order of government. But in extreme, imminent, universal dangers, methods of the last resort, if necessary and likely to succeed, are fully warranted; by the nature of the thing, by our original constitution, by ancient practice upon it, and royal recognitions of it.

The Scripture indeed commands what reason itself doth: subjection to the supreme powers.—But how many other commands are there, which confessedly admit of proper exceptions? And were this to admit of none, yet the Scripture doth not determine, in whose hands the supreme power is lodged. And where it is divided, as it is with us, between the king and his great council, by whose joint authority every statute is expressed to be made: he, who refuses to stand to that division, as the late king James did openly, both by word and deed, renounces the authority that belonged to him under it; and other authority he hath none. Or suppose even this doubtful; the Scripture requires subjection: but to whom? To *the powers that be*, the actual, visible governments of every country. These it declares *are ordained of God;* and that *they who resist shall receive damnation* *. Not the least hint given, of enquiring into the justice of an establishment in its first rise long ago: a thing which few subjects can do, and perhaps few governments can bear. Not the slightest intimation,

* Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

of adhering for ever to the family of an abdicated prince, and going on, age after age, to ascribe the sovereign authority over a nation, to a person that hath no means of exercising any one act of authority. The necessities of mankind render it absurd: the practice and the notions of mankind have always been contrary to it. Heathens, Jews, Christians, Papists, Protestants, all the world have agreed in the point with universal consent; excepting a small handful of men in this one age and nation: persons greatly to be pitied, and highly to be esteemed, while they submit peaceably to inconveniences for conscience sake; but surely guilty of as indefensible a singularity, as ever was.

There may indeed often be a doubt, and sometimes it may last a good while, which are *the powers that be:* whether a government is yet to be considered as established, or not. But in our own case, if a duration of so many years, and the peaceable succession of so many princes, and the repeated acknowledgments of the whole people of these kingdoms, and of all the sovereigns and nations of the earth, do not make it a clear point, in whose hands the supreme authority of this country long hath been, and actually now is: nothing of such a nature can ever be clear at all. Very few of us have either known, or lived under, any other government: we have all of us claimed, and enjoyed the protection of this: we have acted in pursuance of its authority; we have prayed continually for its preservation; we have many of us bound our souls by solemn oaths, and some of us by repeated ones, to maintain it: in so doing, we maintain at the same time, every thing that is valuable to us and our posterity: and there cannot

be a firmer tie upon us, than these things together: nor more abandoned wickedness, than to break through it.

Strengthened thus then within ourselves, let us proceed to *strengthen one another*. God knows, instead of this, we have taken great pains to weaken one another, by separate interests and views, animosities and resentments, unkind suspicions, and unjust imputations. What party or sort of men hath been most to blame in this respect, were it ever so easy to say, would be very unfit: when the plain concern is, not to accuse and recriminate, but all to unite in what affects all so nearly. They therefore, who have hitherto thought the danger of such an attempt small, let them now shew they were far from wishing it greater. They who have been dissatisfied with particular measures of government, let them now give proof, that they were not disaffected to the government itself: and if possibly in any thing they may have opposed too far, take this fittest opportunity of making amends. This will demonstrate the uprightness of their intentions, give weight to their sentiments on other matters, and pull down the false hopes, that our enemies have founded on our domestic disputes. But then, at the same time, if the zeal of any for the present establishment, hath tempted them to judge too hardly concerning the affection of others towards it, they ought now candidly to acknowledge their error: embrace those as true friends, who approve themselves to be such in the day of trial; and remember for the future, that strength is attained, not by division, but by union. Indeed we should all remember, instead of aggravating what our opposers have done amiss, to reflect seriously what

we and our friends have been faulty in: and perhaps we should most of us find, it hath been a great deal too much.

But it is not mutual good temper alone, that our case requires; but mutual assistance and encouragement, to be given with spirit by each of us, according to his ability, and the nature of his station, to all around him: by ranking ourselves openly on the side we are of; joining our counsels, contributing our money, hazarding our persons, if need require it; by instructing, undeceiving, exciting, fortifying, as many others as we can. That part would be indifferent, part timorous, and all resist weakly, was the great thing that the adversaries of the government promised themselves, and its friends were apprehensive of. God be thanked, both of them in some degree have seen their mistake. Let us go on to complete the conviction, by a daily increase of resolute activity. *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees: say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not* *.

One thing more, to be mentioned under this head, is, that if the present endeavour to ruin us should increase, though it were considerably, the public expence necessary to defend us, we are surely neither to wonder, nor to murmur at it; but bear with cheerfulness what may be inconvenient, in order to prevent what must be ruinous; and consider well, that were this design to take place, we should probably pay much more to foreigners, as a reward for enslaving us, than now to our own governors, as the means of keeping us free.

But human means alone, human prudence and strength, be it ever so great, is no sufficient ground

* Isaiah xxxv. 3, 4.

eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices *.

It is by slow and silent, but it is by effectual methods, that God shews himself the governor of the world. Princes that neglect to support his authority, shall find their own decay with it. Subordinate rulers, that trust to other than virtuous arts of government, shall find they have leaned on a broken reed. And nations that indulge profaneness and profligateness, shall experience them to bring on confusion and ruin. Escaping it in one shape for once is nothing: in that, or some other, it must fall upon them, if they continue such as they are. And were ever so great ruin to fall upon us now, what would it be more than Samuel's prediction verified? *If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king* †. And what could we say, but acknowledge before God, with the penitent Jews in Nehemiah, *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us: for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers* (would to God there were not the most cause of all to add, nor we ourselves) *kept thy law* ‡.

Considering our case in this light then, we have small reason to *be of good courage*. And yet, considering the divine mercies, we are far from having any reason to despond, if we have any heart to repent. The cause we are engaged in, is that of right and truth, and God's own honour. Defending it valiantly, is performing one part of our duty to him: and deserting it, would be filling up at once the measure of our iniquities to the utmost. Wicked as we have been, and are, yet if we will but, *at least in this our*

* Prov. i. 29, 30, 31. † 1 Sam. xii. 25.
‡ Neh. ix. 33, 34.

SERMON V.

PREACHED IN 1745.

PHIL. iv. 6, 7.

Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.
And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.

DANGERS are so constant, and sufferings so frequent in human life, that behaving properly under the apprehensions and experience of them, constitutes a very considerable part of our business here. But when Providence permits a peculiar degree of either to be our lot, it calls us peculiarly to think, what methods will best preserve us from them, or carry us through them. Now these are of two sorts: worldly prudence, and religious wisdom. The precepts of the former it is not the business of this place to deliver; but to limit and perfect them by the dictates of the latter: that we may neither endeavour to secure ourselves by acting wrong, nor doubt of support in acting right. We are apt to look on religion, very injuriously, as only prescribing disagreeable duties; whereas it suggests the kindest advice, and superadds the most comfortable promises: which cannot be done more completely, in the great

point of moderating fear and uneasiness, than it is in the text; where we have

I. A friendly caution: *Be careful for nothing.*

II. A most necessary direction: *But in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*

III. An assurance of the happy effect, which this conduct will produce: *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.*

I. A friendly caution: *Be careful for nothing:* words, which neither common reason allow us to take in their utmost extent, nor Scripture itself. For it every where demands from us the most earnest care about the things of another world: and enjoins, quite as often as it needed, a moderate care about the affairs of this. *Being careful* therefore must mean, in the passage which I have read to you, as an expression mighty little varied from it, being full of care, doth for the most part, in our daily speech; not a discreet and rational, but a disquieting and tormenting solicitude: and that principally, not concerning our behaviour, which is the only thing in our power; but the event, which is often entirely out of it. This the original Greek phrase elsewhere usually signifies, though not always. In the sixth of St. Matthew it is many times rendered, *Take no thought.* But there also we must remember, that only what is immoderate was intended to be forbidden: which, it had been happy, if our translation had more determinately expressed.

Thoughtfulness concerning our deportment, our welfare, that of others, and the public, so far as it will really be of use, is a duty of indispensable obligation. And first acting at random, then turning

our eyes from the evil day, when we see it coming, instead of considering how we may avert it, or make the best provision against it, will prove the surest way to bring it on with its blackest horrors. But the contrary extreme, anxiety, is both a miserable feeling in itself, and the parent of many farther mischiefs, without any mixture of good. It represents every object of terror as vastly greater than it is in truth: and frequently gives far more pain beforehand than the presence of all that we fear, is capable of giving. Nay, it makes us tremble at mere spectres: and fills us with the most alarming suspicions, sometimes of what cannot happen, often of what is highly improbable. And yet, were it ever so likely, excessive dread will do nothing towards preserving us from it. Calm reflection will instruct and excite us to do every thing for ourselves, which we are able to do: and the utmost agonies of disquiet can never carry us beyond our abilities. Indeed very commonly vehement emotions either hinder us from seeing what is fit, or disqualify us from performing it: nay, hurry us into what is very unfit, and prejudicial to the point which we have in view.

But were they to leave us otherwise entirely masters of ourselves, the eagerness of looking farther than we can see, which they always beget, hath a powerful tendency to mislead us very unhappily. Dangers, which we think we discern at a distance, may have no reality: or if they have, may never draw near. Dangers that are near may never reach us: and evils, that have reached us, may vanish on a sudden. These are no reasons against prudent forecast: but they are strong reasons against extracting wretchedness out of speculations on futurity, instead of following quietly and cheerfully the proper busi-

ness of the present day; since *we know not what another may bring forth* *, and consequently require us to contrive or execute, to grieve or rejoice at. *To-morrow,* our blessed Saviour hath told us, *shall take thought for the things of itself* †: time, as it runs on, will direct us much better than we can guess now, what precautions we are to take, and what judgments we are to form, about remote affairs: and since all, that appears at this instant likely to fall out, or wise to do, may possibly in the next appear quite otherwise; we ought studiously to moderate both our actions and our passions, by recollecting the mutability of the world: which would save us a vast deal of fruitless labour, and needless misery. We every one of us think the sorrows of life abundantly enough: why then should we multiply them by long anticipations; and load ourselves at once with misfortunes present and to come, unmindful of our gracious Lord's important maxim: *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof* ‡? Had our Maker framed the human mind in such manner, that we must have been *always forecasting grievous things* §, and suffering every hour, in thought, all that through a course of years we are to suffer in reality, and much more; we should certainly have looked on it as very hard usage. Why then will we bring ourselves into a state, in which if God had placed us, we should have complained of him, as cruel? He hath mercifully hid future events from us, lest the foresight of them should make us unhappy. And we pry into them by conjecture, and dwell upon them by imagination, that we may be unhappy whether he will or not.

This, you see, is more than folly: it is evidently sin.

* Prov. xxvii. 1.
† Matt. vi. 34.
‡ Matt. vi. 34.
§ Wisd. xvii. 11.

He intended us to live here in comfort and peace: and we are not at liberty to frustrate his design, by making ourselves uneasy and wretched. Both nature and Scripture plainly forbid it. Nor have we the least ground to hope, that the fault will be deemed a punishment severe enough for itself. Many others are accompanied with grievous misery, to which notwithstanding more hereafter is deservedly threatened. And the guilt of inordinate solicitude is greater than we generally apprehend. It implies, not only disobedience to God, but distrust in him. It unfits us for the offices of piety and of common life. By dejecting the spirits, and souring the temper, it renders us different, in many respects, from what we should be, to all around us. It leads persons into strong temptations, of raising and cheering themselves under their troubles by false and pernicious supports, or of seeking deliverance from them by dishonest arts and compliances. It infects others, who see it, with the same apprehensions: which may produce the same or worse effects on their quiet, nay their innocence. And in proportion, as discouraging alarms become epidemical, the calamity dreaded becomes likely to happen. Still, so much of this wrong turn, as is really constitutional and unavoidable weakness, will certainly not be imputed as criminal. And therefore we ought not to double our uneasiness, by adding to involuntary anxieties a rigid condemnation of ourselves for them: but strive against them to the utmost of our power; and then be satisfied with the consciousness, that we have done so: only not deceiving our hearts with a notion, that we have resisted fears, which in truth we have indulged.

But some will say, "How can we resist them? Must we not of necessity be terrified at what we

" perceive is terrible; be concerned about what we " are sensible is of great concern to us? Where is " the virtue of pretending to blind ourselves, or even " of doing it actually, if we could?" None at all certainly. But the rule prescribed you is, not to shut, but open your eyes, and contemplate the whole of your case deliberately and impartially. For perhaps it is not so bad, perhaps not near so bad, as you conceive, though you were to look on it only in a worldly view. And yet were outward appearances, and our own strength, all that we had to look at, there would be no wonder, if sometimes our hearts fainted within us at the prospect; for the stoutest and the proudest hearts have fainted, before us, on like occasions. But the never-failing foundation of comfort is this. A being infinitely powerful, wise, and benevolent, superintends the universe continually; these attributes afford us large ground of hope, and, that our own unworthiness may raise no doubt, his express declarations give us full assurance, that if we fly to him with humble faith, *he will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape* *. The most usual anxiety of men is about the daily necessaries of life. With respect to these therefore he condescends to argue with us particularly; and the argument will hold as well concerning less common exigencies; that since he sustains the vegetable part of the creation, which can do nothing for itself, and the animal, which cannot do near so much as we; certainly he will take of us, on doing what we ought, a care proportionable to the superiority of our nature. For in this lies the force of our Saviour's reasoning. And when he saith, *Behold the fowls of the air; they sow*

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

not; neither do they reap; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: are ye not much better than they * ? He doth not mean, that they take no pains, and therefore we are to take none. They take a great deal, in seeking food and contriving security against dangers, for themselves and for their young, according to the extent of their faculties. And we are to take as much, in proportion to the extent of ours. But then, as Providence furnishes to them, so far as consists with its wise purposes, whatever they need, and cannot acquire by their own power; the same Providence will certainly watch over us with more peculiar tenderness, even in the present state: besides that, what we suffer now shall increase our happiness hereafter. And therefore, since they are easy in their condition, well may we in ours. For it would be strange indeed, if that order of earthly beings, which enjoys the greatest favour beyond all comparison, should be the only one discontented. Reflect then: where human care ends, the divine care begins. The duty of to-day is our business; the event of to-morrow is our heavenly Father's: and surely you do not wish to remove it out of his hands into your own; or surmise, that you can possibly be unsafe, while under the protection of him, with whom *the very hairs of your head are all numbered* †. Here then we have a secure refuge against inquietude. But let us remember: if, having it, we use it not; if, professing faith in God, we allow ourselves to be as much disconcerted and perplexed on every alarm, as they that *have no hope, and are without God in the world* ‡; we either think unworthily of him, or behave quite unsuitably to what we think; and our guilt is greater, as our temptation to it is less. When therefore, on

* Matt. vi. 26. † Matt x. 30. ‡ Eph. ii. 12.

being troubled and cast down, we are inclined to lay the blame on accidental or natural lowness of spirits, or whatever excuse occurs, let us *take heed lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief**, or disobedience. If there be, amending that is the way to *uphold him that was falling, and strengthen the feeble knees* †.

But in vain shall we attempt any thing beneficial to us, if we trust to ourselves for success. And therefore, to make his caution effectual, the Apostle subjoins,

II. A most necessary direction. *In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*

The usual method is, to be *careful about many things* ‡, and pray about nothing: but the right one is, to be careful about nothing, but pray about every thing, which is of importance enough to be laid before the Lord of all. The movements of our hearts indeed, though unuttered, are clearly discerned by him: and he foresaw from eternity whatever we should wish on every occasion. But the Scripture speaks in the language of men: and calls that *making known our requests to God,* which is only expressing before him what he is perfectly acquainted with already, in order to imprint more efficaciously, on ourselves and others, the sentiments concerning him, which belong to our condition.

Applying to the Almighty in our difficulties immediately reminds us, on whom we and all things depend: and brings it strongly to our thoughts, that the most threatening dangers cannot advance one step farther, than infinite wisdom sees it proper they should, and infinite goodness permits. Placing ourselves in his presence, awes and composes our worldly

* Heb. iii. 12. † Job iv. 4. ‡ Luke x. 41.

fears; not by a servile dread of him, forcibly overcoming them, and substituting itself, a still worse terror in their stead; but by a filial reverence, mixed with humble reliance on his favour, which calms and revives us in such a manner, that we perceive our solicitudes to vanish even whilst we are confessing them; and quickly smile at what we shuddered at before. Then, besides, venting our desires to him, shews us in the fullest light, which are sinful, and to be repressed, if we hope for acceptance with him; and begging his help, must powerfully admonish us, that we are not to think of helping ourselves by methods displeasing to him; but adhere strictly to our duty, and be assured it will lead us out of whatever perplexities it leads us into. *Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass* *. Further yet, praying to *our* Father which is in heaven, leads us to consider him as our common Father: who is concerned, not only for us, but for all our friends; and expects us to be zealous for the general good, as well as our own; and on no account to withdraw from the service of the body, of which he hath made us members. Piety therefore, excites the truest and firmest public spirit; but smooths and tempers, at the same time, that roughness and vehemence, which too frequently renders it ineffectual and hurtful, by promoting, as it doth beyond all things, an humble opinion of ourselves, and meekness towards others.

With such dispositions, we shall be duly qualified for the mercy we intreat: and they who are, will never fail to receive it. For *this is the confidence which we have in him,* saith the beloved disciple, *that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.*

* Psalm xxxvii. 5.

And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we desired of him *. We are sure of the very favours we beg, if they are conducive to his glory, and the happiness of his creatures: which doubtless the deliverance of this nation from its enemies must be, since we profess and support his holy truth, would we but penitently conform our conduct to it. And his long forbearance under our provocations, gives us room to expect every instance of mercy, in case of our amendment. What indeed the humble applications of a few may do for others, he only knows. But for themselves they will certainly obtain infinitely greater benefits, than sharing in the highest degree of earthly prosperity. Now the sole reason of our praying for any thing is, that we suppose it will be good for us. And therefore we pray for nothing of this world absolutely, but on that condition. So that if God, who knows best, withholds it because it would be otherwise, he grants our request in the general, though he refuses it in the particular: and if we are wise, far from being overwhelmed by the severest dispensations, we shall not only be contented, but glad, in such measure as human infirmity and sympathy permit, that *His will should be done, not ours* †.

For this cause the Apostle, when he might have said, what most people would have thought very sufficient, that we should *make our requests known unto God* with resignation, chose to say more, that we should do it *with thanksgiving*. And indeed we ought to be heartily thankful, not only for the many and great blessings, temporal and spiritual, national and personal, which God continues to us in the midst of his corrections, (O that we would all think

* 1 John v. 14, 15. † Luke xxii. 42.

seriously, how many and great they are!) but even for his corrections themselves: and much more for the alarms and warnings, the liftings up of his rod, which are designed to prevent the necessity of heavier judgments. What he doth with this view, though it produce terrifying apprehensions, is the most real kindness; the only kindness, that we permit him at present to shew. Many, we may hope, will be influenced by such awful notices, to amend their ways. But at least we need not fail of being influenced ourselves to what is right. And then, whatever the event be to those around us, to us it shall be happy: if in no other respect, yet in that, which, beyond all comparison, is of the greatest consequence: *Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* *.

Knowing these things, well might the Apostle add in the text,

III. An assurance of the blessed effect, which raising our thoughts from earth to heaven will produce. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.*

Bad persons, as they have never any well-grounded, have seldom any long-continued peace of mind, even in prosperity: and much less can they hope for it in troubles and dangers. If they have not been just and merciful, they are conscious of ill-deserving behaviour to their fellow-creatures. If they have not been uniformly virtuous and religious, they know they have acted undutifully and ungratefully to their Creator. If they have not by due application for pardon reconciled themselves to him, the guilt of

* 1 Cor. iv. 17.

And, though undoubtedly seasons of difficulty and hazard will give some uneasiness to the best minds; yet no more, than is moderate, and very tolerable: no more, than leaves them, on the whole, in a peaceful state; and able to *cast*, if not *all*, as they should, yet the most of *their care on him, who careth for them* *.

Let us therefore try ourselves by this rule, whether we have indeed practical faith and confidence in the Almighty. And if not, let us instantly labour to obtain it, by a total forsaking of *our iniquities, which have separated between us and him* †, and humble addresses *for grace to help in time of need* ‡. The common resource is to the help of man alone: *there be many that say, Who will shew us any good?* but the language of a well-instructed heart is, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us* §. *Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses: but let us remember the name of the Lord our God* ‖: provide for our security with the utmost prudence, and defend our cause with the boldest zeal; but still rely on him alone, *who giveth victory unto kings* ¶. Every other aid may fail: but God cannot. *He is able to save by many or by few* **: *to break the arm of the wicked* ††, *and disappoint the devices of the crafty* ‡‡. *He stilleth the raging of the sea, the noise of its waves, and the madness of the people* §§. Under his conduct, the *things*, that seem the most *against us* ‖‖, may prove the very means of our deliverance: and the fiercest storms drive the ship with more speed into a safe harbour. Therefore *say to them that are of a fearful*

* 1 Pet. v. 7. † Isa. lix. 2. ‡ Heb. iv. 16.
§ Psalm iv. 6, 7. ‖ Psalm xx. 7. ¶ Psalm cxliv. 10.
** 1 Sam. xiv. 6. †† Psalm x. 15. ‡‡ Job v. 12.
§§ Psalm lxv. 7. ‖‖ Gen. xlii. 36.

*Be strong, fear not: behold your God will come with a recompense: he will come and save you**. All who are penetrated with these truths, though timorous naturally, and while the danger is distant, shall, when it draws near, *out of weakness be made strong, and waxed valiant in fight* †: not with a tumultuous and transitory animal courage, but a calm and stedfast resolution, *keeping*, as the Apostle expresses it, *their hearts and minds*, quieting their passions, fixing their judgments, and by consequence determining their behaviour. The reasonings of such persons will be those of the Psalmist: *God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea: though the waters rage and swell, and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same. The rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed: God shall help her, and that right early. The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are moved: but God sheweth his voice, and the earth shall melt away. The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge* ‡. These are the grounds, and there cannot be stronger, on which a good person, unless he is wanting to himself, *will not be afraid of any evil tidings: for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord* §. Nay, were it not the pleasure of God to deliver his people from their enemies, even in that case, they would be enabled to *suffer according to his will, and commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator* ‖.

* Isa. xxxv. 4. † Heb. xi. 34. ‡ Psalm xlvi. 1—7.
§ Psalm cxii. 7. ‖ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

But then we must ever observe, by whose means alone this unconquerable firmness, this inconceivable serenity, is to be acquired. *The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.* For as, without faith in religion, persons very often have no refuge at all in the storms and troubles that overtake them; so, without faith in the Christian religion, they are liable still to most uneasy and disheartening fluctuations; from doubts, how far providence extends; doubts of their own title to forgiveness and favour; doubts of the existence and duration of a future reward: to all which the Gospel hath put the happiest end; informing mankind with certainty of every thing that could induce them to act right with cheerful perseverance; and confirming the highest expectations, which they can possibly entertain, by that equally convincing and affecting argument: *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things* * ? Thus then *we have hope, as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;* lays hold on the promised state of invisible glory, *whither the Forerunner is entered for us,* to take possession already in our name, *even Jesus* †: whose gracious words to his disciples we ought to have constantly present to our thoughts, when clouds arise and darken our prospect, hang over our heads, and seem ready to burst upon us. *These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world* ‡. *Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid* §.

* Rom. viii. 32.
† Heb. vi. 19, 20.
‡ John xvi. 33.
§ John xiv. 27.

I. Of his danger: *A great death, of which he had the sentence within himself.*

II. Of his defender from it: *God, who had delivered, and did still deliver him.*

III. Of the reasons, for which he was first permitted to fall into this danger, then brought out of it: *that he might not trust in himself, but might trust in God, which raiseth the dead:* as accordingly he declares he doth, for deliverances yet future.

I. His danger: *A great death, of which he had the sentence within himself.* Death, being the extremity of temporal sufferings, in the Hebrew idiom, which expresses every thing strongly, signifies any very dreadful evil or hazard. Thus Pharaoh, on the plague of locusts, begs of Moses; *Entreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only* *. But more especially hazard of life goes under that name. Whence David speaks of himself, as *counted with them that go down into the pit; free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave* †. Now St. Paul, to use his own phrase towards the latter end of this Epistle, had been *in deaths often* ‡. And therefore the term, *so great a death,* must denote, that on the occasion, to which he refers, his peril was eminent, peculiarly terrible, and, humanly speaking, unavoidable. His own words are, *we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life* §. Farther particulars cannot now be discovered, excepting one, which he adds, of small consequence to us, that this trouble came to him in Asia. But by his manner of notifying it, and the warmth of his description, it must have been recent, since he wrote the former Epistle.

* Exod. x. 17.
† Psalm lxxxviii. 4, 5.
‡ Exod. xi. 23.
§ Psalm lxxxviii. 8.

ourselves? Were we not *troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears* *: *men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which were coming on the earth* †? and had we been asked, at some junctures especially, as the prophet was, in language akin to that of the text, *Can these dry bones live?* can this exhausted nation rise up again, and shake off the pressures, from every quarter, under which it labours? what other reply, at best, could we have made, than his? *O Lord God, thou knowest* ‡. For surely the wisest of men did not know: nor could the bravest answer for the event, after it had been so frequently contrary to what we thought the most rational expectations. Of this only there was certainty, that we had the loudest call to adopt the Psalmist's prayer: *O God, thou hast cast us off, and scattered us; thou hast also been displeased: O turn thee unto us again. Thou hast moved the land, and divided it: heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh* §. And praised be his name, that we can now add the words which follow those: *Thou hast given a token for such as fear thee, that they may triumph because of thy truth* ‖.

And we have accordingly triumphed in this comfortable earnest of prosperity, returning to us after so long an absence, with a joy as cordial and universal, as perhaps this nation ever expressed. May both our friends and our enemies know it, and draw the natural conclusions from it, to the encouragement of the former, the dismay of the latter. But then, if we *triumph* only for the safety of our persons and properties, and not *because of God's truth*, and

* 2 Cor. vii. 5. † Luke xxi. 26. ‡ Ezek. xxxvii. 3.
§ Psalm lx. 1, 2. ‖ Ezek. xxxvii. 4.

pure religion; if we rejoice, and overlook the Author of our joy, *the Giver of all victory;* we shall fall inexcusably short of our duty, and the example set us by the Apostle: who subjoins immediately to his account of the danger, which he had escaped,

II. A thankful mention of his Defender from it: *God, who had delivered, and did still deliver him.*

It is evidently both as easy for the Supreme Being, and as worthy of him, to govern the universe, as to create it. Indeed the only purpose, for which divine Wisdom could create it, must be to conduct every part of it to a right end: and the smallest parts are no more beneath his attention, than the greatest; for he is infinitely above all. What reason thus teaches, holy Scripture confirms with important additions: informing us, that a future day is appointed for the full and final display of his justice and goodness towards the children of men; but that in the mean time his providence is active, so far as the constitution of things established by him permits, and not the least occurrence comes to pass, without the superintending care of *our Father, which is in heaven* *. We are often indeed ignorant, by what means he acts; for he is able to influence, unperceived, not only the course of inanimate nature, but the minds of rational agents, and to produce the greatest events from the slightest occasions. We are often equally ignorant of his views in acting: for *we know but in part* †: whereas *all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do* ‡. The imperfection of our discernment therefore must be no hindrance to our faith: but our plain duty is to reverence implicitly those proceedings of his, the man-

* Matt. x. 29. † 1 Cor. xiii. 9. 12. ‡ Heb. iv. 13.

ner and grounds of which are hid from us: as well as to pay him more particular acknowledgments on account of such as we understand.

For in many cases the hand of God is clearly visible: but no where more than in the correction, and yet preservation, of *states professing his holy and eternal truth**: as indeed there cannot be on earth fitter objects of his righteous providence. Thus in all ages he hath watched over his church. Thus more especially he hath treated this church and land, ever since the Reformation: *visiting our offences with the rod, and our sin with scourges; nevertheless his loving kindness hath he not utterly taken from us, nor suffered his truth to fail*†. *Many a time have they fought against me from my youth up, may Israel now say; yea, many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up, but they have not prevailed against me. The ploughers have ploughed upon my back, and made long furrows: but the righteous Lord hath hewn the snares of the ungodly in pieces*‡. And surely in the troubles, which we have undergone of late, a pious and thoughtful mind may trace evident footsteps of divine interposition. Why else, on the one hand, did our enemies increase, prevail, and escape, so surprisingly, for so long together? Why, on the other, did they so unaccountably miss the fairest and most palpable opportunities of undoing us effectually; neither pursuing at home the advantages they had gained, nor procuring the succours, which their friends abroad in all prudence ought to have sent them? And why, lastly, have they allowed us to obtain so decisive a victory, in a few moments, at the expence of so little blood lost on our side, (would

* Office for November 5. † Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33.
‡ Psalm cxxix. 1—4.

God their own, poor deluded wretches, could have been spared), when both from the encouragement of their preceding successes, and the necessity of exerting themselves to the utmost in this crisis of their fate, a very obstinate engagement was to have been expected? Whence have these things happened thus, but that *God ruleth in the kingdom of men* *? *The Lord maketh the devices of the people to be of none effect, and casteth out the counsels of princes. But the counsel of the Lord shall endure for ever, and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation. Blessed are the people, whose God is the Lord Jehovah; and blessed are the folk, that he hath chosen to be his inheritance* †.

Let us learn therefore, and acknowledge, for it is a very bad sign if we are unwilling, that both our dangers and our deliverances are from above. This will in no degree lessen the guilt of our enemies: for they were prompted by their own wickedness unjustly to attempt, what Heaven for our wickedness might justly have permitted. Nor can it ever be a plea for yielding tamely to their enterprises, that God makes use of them to serve his purposes. We know not the extent of those purposes; which he will certainly execute, as far as they extend: and are therefore to do our evident duty. If he suffers our adversaries to attack our most valuable rights, he both empowers and commands us to defend them: and they, who consider themselves as his instruments for this end, will act with unspeakably more faithfulness and zeal, than such as are induced by worldly motives alone; which frequently other worldly motives, and sometimes very trifling ones, may outweigh: whereas there is no counterbalance to a principle of conscience. Nor doth it in the least detract from the merit of our

* Dan. v. 21. † Psalm xxxiii. 10, 11, 12.

soldiers and commanders, that *the salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord, who also is their strength in the time of trouble* *. Every pre-eminence is more estimable for being his gift; every great action, for being done by his guidance: and the highest of those, who have wrought this deliverance for us, are surely the most deeply sensible, that the noblest of their distinctions is, being employed by their Maker, and fellow-workers with him, for the support of genuine religion, virtuous liberty, and public happiness. This way of thinking will inspire the most composed moderation, along with the most undaunted bravery: and whoever makes it the basis of his conduct, will be entitled to all demonstrations of respect from men: and yet abundantly contented with *the honour, that cometh from God only* †.

Every thing that befalls us therefore, adverse or prosperous, let us look on it as proceeding from the just and good pleasure of our heavenly Father: humble ourselves before him in all our afflictions; and, which is our present concern, be thankful to him in all our rejoicings. *If the Lord himself had not been on our side, let Israel now say, if the Lord himself had not been on our side, when men rose up against us: they had swallowed us up quick, when they were so wrathfully displeased at us: yea, the waters had drowned us,——the deep waters of the proud had gone over our soul. But praised be the Lord, who hath not given us over for a prey unto their teeth* ‡. This is the language, that expresses the truth of our case: and it is of infinite importance, that we own it unanimously. For the sovereign Disposer of the universe will neither be denied nor forgot, without vindicating the glory of his name: and he hath long ago pronounced the sen-

* Psalm xxxvii. 40. † John v. 44. ‡ Psalm cxxiv. 1—5.

tence: *They regard not in their mind the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands; therefore shall he break them down and not build them up* *. But the duty and the necessity of such regard will more distinctly appear by considering,

III. The reasons, for which the Apostle was first brought into danger, then brought out of it: that he might learn by the former *not to trust in himself*; and by the latter, *to trust in God, which raiseth the dead.*

Now if there was need of improving St. Paul in this lesson, much more is there of teaching it others. And never perhaps was any nation, at least which made profession of faith in Christ, so deplorably inattentive to it as ours. Our wealth, our fleets, our valour, have been for many years past, till very lately, our continual boast. And in vain had the Scripture forewarned us: *Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord* †. How then should God convince us of so pernicious an error; and shew us, that we were not sufficient of ourselves? By the very method, which he hath taken. *He hid his face, and we were troubled* ‡: storms rose around us; and the most dangerous, where we thought there was nothing to produce any: our navy proved no protection; our valour sunk into panic terrors; our *riches* were on the point of *making themselves wings and flying away* §; a general bankruptcy threatened us; and what the *kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed, the adversary and the enemy were* near *entering into the gates of Jerusalem* ‖. Who could possibly have apprehended that the landing of six or seven men should have put this great nation

* Psalm xxviii. 6. † Jer. xvii. 5. ‡ Psalm civ. 29.
§ Prov. xxiii. 5. ‖ Lam. iv. 21.

into such confusion? Who could ever have conceived, that the disturbers of our peace should have multiplied and conquered as they did; should have advanced and retreated, and ranged at will through our land, with so perfect security, for so long a time? And what is all this, but a call from God to know ourselves, and abase our pride before him: a practical declaration, *that no flesh shall glory in his presence* *.

But necessary as this instruction is, yet singly it is not enough. When irreligious persons have found by experience, that they cannot rely on their own strength, they have no other left to rely on: and so are tempted to despair in their minds, to fail in their duty, to seek refuge in cowardly and treacherous artifices for their own preservation. But very different are the sentiments of the pious man's heart. Let ever so unexpected calamities happen, let ever so alarming dangers approach, with ever so little appearance of surmounting them: still he knows, that nothing can be so dangerous, as to desert the post, in which God hath placed him; and that *he, who is faithful unto death, shall receive a crown of life* †. At the same instant therefore, that he saith, *There be many that fight against me, O thou most highest,* he is enabled to say also, *nevertheless, though I am sometime afraid, yet put I my trust in thee* ‡. And this is the spirit, which God intends to excite, by sending after extreme perils, remarkable and sudden deliverances. From these it is natural to learn faith in him, *that raises the dead,* that restores from the most helpless condition; and since *he hath delivered,* to form reviving hopes, that *he will yet deliver;* which we

* 1 Cor. i. 29. † Rev. ii. 10. ‡ Psalm lvi. 2, 3.

may and ought to do now. He hath given us a victory speedier, cheaper, completer, than we could even have flattered ourselves with. He hath given it by the means of a young prince, whose confessed abilities, vigilant attention, unwearied diligence, and intrepid firmness, on all occasions, as well as his wonderful success on the present, afford us the justest ground of persuasion, that he is chosen by Providence for the service and support of his father, his family, his country. And the same God, who hath *begun to shew his mighty hand* *, can, with the same ease, accomplish his good work, and bring it to perfection.

But then, alas! what avails it that he can, unless we have cause to trust that he will? And whence shall we have this? Thankfulness for past mercies undoubtedly is the way to secure future. And just now we seem in earnest thankful. But if your gratitude prove to be superficial and short-lived, like that of the Jews, *they sang praise unto him: but within a while they forgat his works, they would not abide his counsel;* what can we expect else, than judgments like theirs? *Then he lift up his hand against them, to overthrow them* †. Our state, though vastly altered for the better, is still a very undesirable, indeed a very melancholy one. Our burdens are unavoidably augmenting, and our strength wasting. Foreign force may soon renew our intestine commotions: or even, without their intervention, subject us all directly to it itself. The failures of our friends give us, year after year, new reason to say with the Psalmist, *O be thou our help in trouble: for vain is the help of man* ‡. *Put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of man: for there is no help in them. Blessed is he that hath*

* Deut. iii. 24. † Psalm cvi. 12, 13. 26. ‡ Psalm lx. 11.

*the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God**. But we cannot hope for the continuation of his protection, unless we answer the intention of it: which the nature of the thing, as well as holy writ, assures us is, *that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we may serve him without fear* †. It is not then, that we may sin against him without fear: that we may return securely to the follies and vices, the impiety and profaneness, from which we abstained, while his hand lay heavy upon us. Then we professed to observe days of fasting and prayer. And what was the language of them? "Spare us, "good Lord, that we may safely go on to be as bad "as we have been, and worse?" Surely not. Some indeed expressed, even in the midst of danger, an open scorn of them: others were evidently kept from it by mere outward decency. Many however were awakened, spoke and thought seriously, resolved well, prayed heartily. But are they not most of them already, or shall we not find them soon, relapsed again into their old neglect? For such hath always been the course of human nature, unless carefully restrained by conscientious vigilance. *When he slew them they sought him, and turned them early, and enquired after God: and they remembered that God was their strength, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, and dissembled with him in their tongue. For their heart was not whole with him: neither continued they stedfast in his covenant* ‡. After this feint of reformation, they grew, as men always do, wickeder than before. And I beg you to attend to the final consequence. *When God saw this, he was wroth, and took sore displeasure*

* Psalm cxlvi. 2. 4. † Luke i. 74. ‡ Psalm lxxviii. 34—37.

at Israel: he delivered their power into captivity; and their beauty into the enemy's hand *.

If therefore it be asked, what we shall do to shew our thankfulness acceptably, the answer is plain: *Walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless* †; but practise those with more especial zeal, which either our circumstances particularly require, or our hearts tell us we have particularly transgressed.

Common prudence is one part of our duty; which we have unaccountably slighted. We have increased amusements and gaieties to a degree unexampled, just when Providence hath called us most loudly to thoughtful consideration. We have increased expensiveness to an equal degree, when perhaps our own fortunes, but certainly those of multitudes, whom our example tempts and often almost forces to imitation, are incapable of bearing it. And both these indiscretions have produced personal miseries and national inconveniences without number. We have disregarded, and affected to disregard, the care of our families, and the proper business of our several employments, though sometimes perhaps important ones, not only to indulge our appetites, but to gratify our caprices: behaviour, in every rank and station, fruitful of mischief; but in the higher of most dreadful and extensive mischief. In matters of national concern, we have followed our private interests, resentments, friendships, instead of truth, and right, and general good. We have framed and supported useless and hurtful distinctions and divisions; and been unjustly vehement in mutual reproaches; till our enemies were encouraged to fancy, that one

* Psalm lxxviii. 60. 62. † Luke i. 6.

half of us was ready to join them. We have vilified our governors, till we had almost disowned the blessings of government: and it was very near being too late, that our affection to an establishment, on which our own happiness depends, revived, after an indifference, that foreboded immediate ruin. Let us never forget more what we have been so seasonably convinced of now: but always esteem as highly our laws and liberties, and the august house that secures them, as we did in that hour, when the hazard of losing them was most imminent. But let us amend in every other point also: and while there is yet *space to repent* *, become a sober-minded, frugal, industrious, honest, and united people. For we cannot else continue a free one: neither the justice of God, nor the connexions of human affairs, will permit it.

These then are fundamental rules of private prudence. With those of public wisdom we have no concern here, beyond two particulars. The first is our obligation to pray, that God would incline those, who are in authority over us, to consider seriously what have been the cause of our troubles, and direct them to proper remedies: would enable them to preserve, both in punishments and precautions, the true medium between too great severity and too great indulgence: would instruct them, how to reconcile all that wish well to the community: and how to prevent others from renewing any more our sufferings, or their own. The second is, our consequent obligation to distrust our own judgment, rather than theirs, in matters of such difficulty; and to use our faithful endeavours, that what they determine may become effectual.

But how rightly soever we are disposed in these

* Rev. ii. 21.

hearts of our bitterest adversaries. For *he refraineth the spirit of princes, and is wonderful among the kings of the earth* *. *When the ways of a man please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him* †. But if their enmity continues, he can check, he can break their power, at its very height: and *strengthen the hands* ‡, direct the counsels, prosper the undertakings of his people; so that *no man shall be able to stand before them* §. *For his is the greatness, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty* ‖: *for the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the Governor amongst the nations* ¶. *Let it be thy pleasure, O Lord, to deliver us: make haste, O God, to help us. Let all those that seek thee, be joyful and glad in thee; and such as love thy salvation say alway, The Lord be praised* **.

* Psalm lxxvi. 12. † Prov. xvi. 7. ‡ Neh. vi. 9.
§ Josh. i. 5. ‖ 1 Chron. xxix. 11. ¶ Psal. xxii. 28.
** Psalm xl. 16. 19.

in like manner. And think it not strange, I beseech you, if at present you hear not solely the voice of joy, though never was a juster occasion for it, but are exhorted, even now, to *serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice unto him with reverence* *. I hope many teachers of the word will dwell this day on the same subject: for the advice, here given by our gracious Master, comprehends every thing that our condition requires:

I. A thankful sense of the blessing, which we have received. *Behold, thou art made whole.*

II. A firm resolution of virtuous obedience in return for it. *Sin no more.*

III. A prudent consideration of the danger of behaving otherwise. *Lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

I. A thankful sense of the blessing, which we have received. *Behold, thou art made whole.*

At this time last year, and for many months after, we had a very afflicting sense of the judgments, that threatened us: the whole nation had it, and with the utmost cause. Our religion, our liberties, our lives, our public independence, our private properties, were all at stake. Our forces were few, unsuccessful, and disheartened: the rebels were numerous, flushed with victory, and increasing. Then besides what appeared, we knew not how much more evil we had to apprehend, from abroad or at home, from the fury of our enemies, from the coldness of our friends. The danger too was no less imminent than great: and must soon crush us, if not soon averted. We saw, and felt, and trembled at it; we exerted ourselves against it, with a spirit never known amongst us before: and God forbid we should have forgotten,

* Psalm ii. 11.

God forbid we should ever forget, the impressions that we had so lately, first, of the terrors impending over us, then of the felicity of their sudden dispersion.

It is true, we are not yet perfectly *whole*. Far from it, Heaven knows. But what would we have given once for so happy an approach towards it, as we now possess? Our domestic foes are fallen in battle, or cut off by justice, or driven into other lands, or absconding in corners of their own, impoverished and disarmed, and taught by experience neither to rely on themselves, nor their faithful allies. Our soldiery have recovered their ancient courage and character. The nation in general hath united in active loyalty: we are known and trusted one by another; known and dreaded by our adversaries, who had strangely mistaken our intestine divisions, bad as they were, for something much worse. Our distemper is at least expelled from our vitals, and driven to the extreme parts. We have notice, we have time, to provide against a return of it: and possibly at present France may be feeling from us, in her own dominions, a small share of the sufferings, which she projected for ours, while we are enjoying in peace all that we feared to lose. Whatever we may want therefore to make our happiness complete, we ought to be most deeply sensible, that our portion of it is remarkably large: so large, that there is not surely a nation upon earth with which any one of us, in the midst of all that we have to complain of and lament, would be willing on the whole to change conditions.

But then, as often as we consider to how comfortable a degree we are *whole*, we should always recollect, by what means we were *made whole*. Our

Saviour was not afraid the poor man, whom he cured, should forget that he had regained the use of his limbs, but how he had regained it. And if he, who had been miraculously healed, yet had need of being reminded to whom he owed his health: much more should we, who have been saved by the ordinary methods of Providence, be careful to fix it in our hearts, whence the inestimable benefit was derived. And here let us allow their full proportion of praise, even to the human means: to the justice and mildness of his majesty's government, and the prospect of continued security and tranquillity under his descendants; blessings, which the risk of losing excited the most vigorous efforts for preserving; to the valour, the prudence, the vigilance, the activity of his illustrious son; to the bravery and indignation, thus inspired into his officers and troops; to the unexampled unanimity, zeal, and liberality of his faithful subjects, the nobility, the gentry, the clergy, the commonalty of the realm. Let us ever acknowledge our obligations to the merits of all these. But still let us remember, that men are only instruments in the hand of the Almighty. We have owned this all along by our prayers: let us own it sincerely in our thanksgivings also; and not receive, without suitable gratitude, what we begged with such uncommon earnestness. It is just as true at this hour, as it was then, that *except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain* *. From his displeasure came our danger: from his compassionate goodness, our deliverance. *Therefore despise not* either *the chastenings* or the mercies *of the Almighty. For he maketh sore and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole* †. It cannot be less criminal towards God than

* Psalm cxxvii. 2. † Job v. 17, 18.

men, it is unspeakably more, to ask assistance, and when we have had it, not acknowledge it. He doth not indeed want our acknowledgments; but he hath still an equal right to them; and that he requires them not for his own sake, but for ours, is surely no reason, why we should withhold them.

But you will say, "We do acknowledge God's "mercy in delivering us, and will never deny it." But if after a while you never think of it more, you might almost as well deny it. Or if you think of it, and are not moved by it, that is worse than forgetting it. Or suppose you have ever so warm a feeling of his favours, yet if you refuse to make a proper return for them, this is worst of all. And what return doth he demand? Some hard and unnatural, or expensive and ruinous service? No: the most reasonable thing in itself, and the most beneficial to us and our fellow-creatures, that possibly can be: what the text expresses,

II. A firm resolution of virtuous obedience. *Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more.* God hath been gracious to you: be dutiful to him. Sin is at all times equally absurd and ill-deserving. It is setting up our own perverse will against the authority of our Maker and sovereign Lord; our own passions and caprices, against the wisdom of our heavenly Father: thinking, that we can prosper in opposition to the Almighty: or if not, preferring rebellion and misery to fidelity and happiness. But to sin on, directly in the face of distinguishing mercies, just vouchsafed, this is the most shocking aggravation of the worst thing in the world: a crime so heinous, that perhaps you may resent being thought bad enough to need a caution against it. But the impotent man, whom our Saviour healed, was not, that

we know, a sinner beyond others. And therefore, could we of these nations truly say, that we are not such neither; still the caution, given him, would be a seasonable one to us. We have at least sinned enough to deserve what we have suffered, which is more than a little. And had we deserved nothing farther, yet, as Elihu remarks in the case of Job, *Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more* *.

But, to see, how far such advice is necessary for us, it will be requisite, not to keep in generals, but descend to particulars. And they must be such, as relate to each of us in our private capacities: for I am not speaking now to bodies of men, or to single persons in high stations. May God bestow plentifully on all such, grace to consider, what the warning, *Sin no more,* directs them to, while we consider, what it directs us to. And I apprehend the present occasion calls upon us to avoid, for time to come, four kinds of sin especially: to disregard religion no more; to misbehave towards our rulers no more; to encourage party-disputes and contentions no more; to indulge extravagant pleasures and amusements no more.

1. To disregard religion no more. Perhaps this is the nation upon earth, where it is regarded the least, (our neglect of God's worship in our churches, our families, our closets; the impious talk, the infidel books, that abound every where, afford lamentable evidences of it) though we have confessedly the greatest blessings to incline us to be religious, and the most rational instruction how to be so. Notwithstanding this, who is there amongst us, of any age, who doth not perceive, how much commoner

* Job xxxiv. 31.

and opener both indifference and profaneness are grown within his own time, within a small part of it? Who was there amongst us lately, of any thought, that did not strongly fear we were become so entirely unconcerned about the matter, that even popery would have had no terrors for us? God be thanked, it hath proved otherwise. And permit me to add, let them be thanked also, by whose long despised and reproached labours, a spirit of piety had still in some measure been kept alive: and by whose earnest and seasonable exhortations an unexpected degree of protestant zeal was principally raised. Do us the justice then to bear it in mind, that you wanted our help, and you had it. The enemies of the government avowedly hate us for what we have done: if its friends will not love us for it, our case is hard indeed. But, however you think of us, learn at least to think of the religion we profess, as the truest support, indeed as an essential part, of our happy establishment. Not that preserving it for political purposes alone will be at all sufficient: they, who aim at no more, will come short even of that. God will disappoint them, men will see through them: and infection will spread from hypocrisy, as well as profligateness, though not quite so fast, yet till at length the whole frame is corrupted and destroyed.

You may plead, that however profane the nation may be, we are answerable each for himself only. But indeed, so far as our behaviour can properly influence, we are answerable beyond ourselves. Do we then endeavour to discountenance irreligion, and encourage seriousness in those who belong to us, in those with whom we converse? Do we, as our Saviour hath enjoined us, *confess him before men* *?

* Matt. x. 32. Luke xii. 8.

Or do we not on many occasions outwardly appear *ashamed of him*, while inwardly our hearts condemn us for it?

But were we to answer for ourselves alone, what answer could we give? We are as good as others, perhaps. And what if others be very bad? Will that excuse us from being what the word of God, and our own consciences, tell us we ought to be? If not, we are indeed such? Is concern for our future happiness, is reverence and love of God, the great principle within our breasts? Do we really love him the better for these very mercies, for which we are now met to praise him? We hope so, perhaps. But what proof have we given of it? By serving him better since? And if none, while the motive was fresh upon our minds, what is to be expected afterwards, unless the present call awaken us, as Heaven grant it may!

2. The next point of instruction is, to misbehave towards our rulers no more. The connexion is inseparable, *Fear God: honour the King* *. *For by him kings reign, and princes rule; nobles and all the judges of the earth* †. For which reason we are to respect, not only the person of our sovereign, but, to use the Apostle's words, *all that are in authority* ‡. For without a number of such, government cannot be administered. And professions of duty to him, with unjust bitterness against those whom he entrusts, and causeless opposition to the measures they advise, betray either gross insincerity, or pitiable weakness, or an impetuosity of temper, that should be better governed. This however doth not restrain those, to whose rank or office it belongs, from using the faithful, though possibly sometimes unpleasing, freedom

* 1 Pet. ii. 17. † Prov. viii. 15, 16. ‡ 1 Tim. ii. 1.

stitution. We have felt this: and therefore we shall be inexcusable, unless we remember it; remember to *abstain from all appearance* * of undutifulness; to *keep our mouths with a bridle, while the wicked* or the weak *are before us* †; on no occasion to expect more from our rulers, than we justly may from human creatures, like ourselves; to bear it patiently, if our most equitable expectations are not always answered; and *accept* and acknowledge *every worthy deed they do,* and surely they have done many, *with all thankfulness* ‡. Acting thus, very probably, might have prevented the late rebellion, and may prevent another.

3. A further caution, closely connected with the preceding, is, to encourage party contentions no more. For they always break in, and usually to a high degree, be it ever so undesigned at first, on the respect owing to our governors. Or could that be avoided, one side will be tempted to patronize, for the sake of popularity, what they know, or easily might know, is wrong; to oppose what is useful, or even necessary; to construe the worthiest and wisest conduct unfairly; to prefer the support of their cause before the service of the public; to imagine or pretend, that the prevalence of it will produce every desirable effect; when both reason and experience demonstrate, that little, if any, good is like to follow from it, and possibly much harm. The other side, in return, are tempted to reject what they ought to forward; to insist on what they ought to give up; to oppress their adversaries by superior power: to accuse them of being what they are not, till perhaps they provoke them into being what they would not be. And on both sides these disputes engage men's

* 1 Thess. v. 22. † Psal. xxxix. 1. ‡ Acts xxiv. 2, 3.

principal attention, to the neglect of their common welfare; drive them into doing bad actions, and countenancing bad persons; make foreign friends afraid to rely upon us; and both foreign and domestic enemies bold to enterprise against us. Their late enterprise was chiefly founded on our divisions: which neither they, nor indeed we, could have imagined would have suffered us to unite against them so soon, and so heartly, as we did. God be praised, who inclined our hearts to it: but let us *sin no more*. Each party sees, that the other have sinned: each might see, that they have sinned themselves: both must see, that the event was nearly pernicious: let us take warning for the future.

But it will be of small advantage not to oppose one another, if we all agree in behaving amiss: and therefore,

4. The last caution is, to indulge extravagant pleasures and amusements no more. It is but too visible, how much, living entirely to trifles and follies hath increased in the upper part of the world; and madness for diversions and entertainments, even in the middle and lower; together with most profligate intemperance and debauchery in the lowest of all. Now vicious indulgences are destructive to our temporal, as well as our spiritual interests; to the health and strength, that should labour for and defend the public; to the honesty and regularity, that should secure private peace and comfort. Merely imprudent gratifications, by devouring time and money, as they do beyond imagination, destroy industry, and propagate poverty; which, we must be sensible, is making yearly frightful advances upon us. And when wickedness is instigated by necessity, the worst of consequences may justly be apprehended. Those

of mean rank are then fully ripe for any mischief: and what mischief might we not have dreaded from them ten months ago, had Providence permitted the rebels to reach our capital? Persons of better condition, when distressed, will too often sacrifice every other consideration to the urgent one of supplying their wants, real or fancied; prefer their own present profit, sometimes a trifling profit, before the common safety; heighten groundless discontents, to take advantage of them; nay, join in rebellion itself against their consciences; of which we have lately had a most remarkable example, and ingenuous confession *. May it prove an useful preventive!

A further great evil is, that immoderate lovers of pleasure will of course favour the vilest wretches, who contribute to their entertainment; and too frequently depreciate the worthiest character, if it be a grave one: whence proceed inconveniences without number. But were this despicable inclination hurtful no otherwise; it would be extremely so, by taking off the mind from application to things of moment. Even in persons the least considerable, indolence, and inattention to their proper business, may have extensive bad effects: and when it grows general among such, it sensibly impoverishes and weakens, and tends to ruin a nation. But they, who are intrusted with matters of importance, may not only, by a series of neglect, but by the ill-timed indulgence of an idle humour for a day or an hour, cause irretrievable mischief to a society, that hath purchased and depends on their best vigilance and industry: which therefore are due to it, not only in point of

* See Foster's account of the behaviour of the late Earl of Kilmarnock after his sentence, p. 6, 7. 10, 11. 41.

Hitherto we have only been washed by the waves: the next time we may sink under them: that surely would be worse. And they, who have now suffered so much from us, would with reason become vastly more formidable to us, were they to succeed hereafter, than if they had succeeded lately.

But where is the impossibility, that without the help of enemies at home, the powerful and inveterate one, which we have abroad, may enslave us ere long immediately to itself: and that without granting even the short reprieve to our religion, liberties, and properties, which perhaps from the former we might hope? Our only defence against both is in God's good providence; and our only ground of trust in that is, if we *sin no more*. For fresh provocations, it must be expected, will bring on severer judgments. Let us often recollect then, that He, who hath delivered us out of the hand of our enemies, can full as easily deliver us into it; and if he doth not, still hath us continually in his own. Every thing terrible, fire, famine, pestilence, waits on his orders. At this instant we are suffering heavily by the last, though hitherto confined to our cattle. But how much longer and more general a ravage it may make amongst them, or to what other species of creatures it may extend at length, and whether not to our own, which of us can say?

But indeed, without any other scourge at all, sin alone, by the natural consequences, which Heaven hath originally annexed to it, is able to ruin us very completely. Contempt of God and our duty may overturn on a sudden, but must undermine gradually, in proportion as it prevails, every blessing that we enjoy; fill every family with disorders and distresses, abolish mutual faith and confidence, open a wide

amendment, without which no true comfort can be administered to them? Relieve us then from the necessity, for we must deal faithfully with you, of saying on thanksgivings just the same terrifying things, that we do on fasts. It would afford us the highest delights to omit them, on both: to set before you only pleasing views, and describe your condition in the language of the Psalmist: *Happy are the people, who are in such a case: yea blessed are the people, who have the Lord for their God* *. It is entirely your own fault, that motives of fear are ever mentioned to you. Our gracious Maker hath furnished us plentifully with a much better ground of obedience, by the numerous mercies, which we have long enjoyed, and still continue to enjoy. Think but a little of the natural advantages of this island; of the civil, the spiritual privileges, that have distinguished it for ages; and what requitals they deserve: think but, how complicated a blessing this last deliverance is: and labour to be induced, as much as you can, by the bounties of God to serve him. But let us be conscious also, that our imperfection, our depravity, needs awe, as well as love, to move us; and use the joint efforts of both, to produce in our souls that filial sorrow, and penitent return to duty, which will prove the inlet, and is the only one, to all manner of consolation.

They, that thus *sow in tears,* are entitled to *reap in joy* † : *their mouth may be filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing* ‡ : they may with propriety, not only give, as they are bound, the more serious demonstrations of pious gratitude, but indulge every lighter expression of a cheerful heart, that innocence and prudence allows. Outward rejoicings for mercies

* Psalm cxliv. 15. † Psalm cxxvi. 6. ‡ Verse 2.

SERMON VIII.

PREACHED ON A GENERAL FAST.

PSALM CXXII. 6.

O pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

God hath planted in the hearts of men, and it is a strong proof of his goodness to us, a principle of tender mutual benevolence; which reason enjoins us to exert on all occasions: and revelation both threatens our transgression of this rule with the severest punishments, and encourages our observance of it by promises of the most effectual assistance and noblest rewards. But as all mankind is an object too large, for the generality of persons to embrace in their affections, and for the rest to think of actually benefiting; the Scripture hath very justly appropriated our *love* to *our neighbour:* to every one, who is any way brought near enough to us, to be capable of receiving any service or mark of kindness from us: according to our Saviour's most rational explication of that term *. And each nation of the world being only a more extensive neighbourhood, of persons combined together, under one head, for common advantage; the views of the several members of it may well reach thus far; but ordinarily scarce farther. And therefore love to our country hath been

* Luke x. 29, &c.

ever considered, not merely as an important and excellent virtue, which it always is, when genuine and judicious; but as filling the whole compass of reciprocal duty, which it usually doth, provided we proportion it rightly to the various relations, which we bear to each person in the society. Now this is the affection, which the Psalmist so warmly recommends in the text: *Peace* being well known to signify, in holy writ, all sorts of prosperity; and *Jerusalem* being the centre of unity of the *Jewish* people, both in religious affairs and civil. *For thither the tribes went up, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord: and there was the seat of judgment, even the seat of the house of David* *.

During the latter part indeed of the time that their government subsisted, they had most of them a zeal for their country, which excluded charity towards the rest of mankind. But this was a corruption, not a precept, of their religion. For no law of any other nation ever enjoined so strictly both justice and mercy to strangers as theirs: though it did provide against needless intercourse with them, to prevent imitation of their evil customs. It is true, they were commanded to extirpate the inhabitants of Canaan. But these were grown to such a height of monstrous idolatry, unnatural lusts, and shocking barbarities, as the wisdom of God saw to be incurable. And he chose the *Israelites* for *his ministers, revengers to execute wrath upon them* †, that they might learn to abhor what they had been employed to punish. This done, their commission expired: for it reached to no other nation. And in fact, they were as quiet neighbours to the heathen round them, and as dutiful subjects to their Chaldean, Persian,

* Psalm cxxii. 4, 5. † Rom. xiii. 4.

and Grecian masters, as any other people. Nor did the text more plainly require them to *pray for the peace of Jerusalem* than the prophet Jeremiah doth, *to seek the peace of the city, whither they were carried captives, and pray unto the Lord for it* *.

We need not therefore scruple to imbibe love of our country from the sacred writings of the Jews: and much less have we cause to imagine, as some would persuade us, that this is a virtue not prescribed to Christians. It is true, that as the Romans had long been ravaging the world, and the Jews in our Saviour's days were evidently ruining themselves; both of them prompted to what they did by a narrow-minded and unjust vehemence for their national interest and honour: he earnestly recommended, as it was necessary, not the particular passion, of which they had already too much; but the general disposition, which they wanted, of good-will to all men. For that is the only sure foundation of social behaviour: and while it restrains persons effectually from doing any thing wrong in favour of their country, will incite them powerfully to do every thing right. In teaching this doctrine therefore, and indeed throughout his whole conduct, he shewed the kindest and wisest regard to his undeserving fellow-citizens: for whom, ill as he was treated by them, he fully appears to have had the most affectionate concern. Witness his tears and pathetic expostulations: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not* †! *If thou hadst known*, or, as it rather should be translated, *O that thou hadst known,*

* Jer. xxix. 7. † Matt. xxiii. 37.

*even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace**. Witness again his peremptory command, even after he had been crucified there, *that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* †. The same heroic sympathy his great Apostle St. Paul expresses, after the severest usage, in the strongest manner, *for his brethren, his kinsmen, according to the flesh,* declaring solemnly before *Christ and the Holy Ghost, that he had great and continual sorrow and heaviness in his heart* on their account ‡. He hath not indeed exhorted the Christians, whom he favoured with his Epistles, to the love of their several countries: for they were all under one dominion, and designed by Providence to remain so. He hath not exhorted magistrates to study the welfare of those, over whom they presided: for there were no believing magistrates; and it might have been deemed presumptuous, and ill intended, if he had laid down directions for others; or foretold explicitly so soon, that the Gospel would come to have authority on its side. But he hath sufficiently, though obliquely, intimated to rulers, what their office requires of them: and urged private subjects most convincingly and awfully to such behaviour, as will render communities quiet and flourishing.

Love of our country therefore is an undoubted Christian duty. And we shall both be directed and encouraged in the performance of it, if we consider, as the text leads us,

I. Wherein the public welfare consists.

II. How we are to express our regard to it.

III. What advantages will flow from expressing it as we ought.

* Luke xix. 41, 42. † Luke xxiv. 47. ‡ Rom. ix. 1, 2, 3.

I. Wherein it consists. Now plainly the happiness of any society is that, which the persons, who compose it, do or may enjoy in it. And therefore wide extent of dominion contributes nothing to the happiness of a state: for such unwieldy bodies are seldom or never kept long in good health. Much less is military glory the point to be had in view, any farther than is needful to secure a peaceable possession of all important national rights. For such a purpose, war is lawful: and they, who hazard their lives in it, worthy of high honour. But in all cases it is accompanied with dreadful evils: of which we are apt to consider the heavy expence, as if it were the only one; and forget the sufferings, and miserable deaths, of such multitudes of human creatures, though every one of them is a murdér committed by the authors of this calamity: besides the innumerable distresses of relations and friends, the devastations, inhumanities, and wickednesses of every kind, which never fail to be its attendants. Then if the event of all should turn, as God grant it always may, to the disadvantage of the aggressors, here is much mischief brought on their neighbours, only to bring more on themselves. Or suppose their success be ever so great, the injury done by them will be great in proportion: they will receive little real good from it, and have paid very dear for that, even in this world: and in another, God will take effectual care, that no one shall have cause to rejoice in having broken his laws, and used his creatures ill.

The next pre-eminence, commonly imagined to constitute the prosperity of a state, is that of wealth; and its usual source, commerce. Now undoubtedly riches are a valuable instrument, both of common

defence, and separate enjoyment. But then they are also a dangerous incentive to luxury and debauchery: by which persons grievously distress themselves, their families, their acquaintance, the public, in many ways, alas! but too well known. And many, whom affluence doth not immediately seduce into gross vices, it leads however to indolence and ignorance, to the admiration of trifles and follies, and thence to the neglect, and afterwards the contempt and ridicule, of virtuous and prudent conduct. This wrong taste being once formed, high honours and pompous appearances are thought necessary by some; the idlest gratifications and vanities, by others: the means to procure and support them must be found: and when their incomes fail, as the largest, with such management, will fail; they must supply the defect by any baseness or iniquity, that they can; at least any such, as general practice, in a time of general corruption, makes a shift to keep in tolerable countenance. This example in the upper part of the world is followed of course by the lower: their industry lessens, their expences increase, their principles are depraved, they and their families ruined; they seek for relief in fraud, violence, or intemperance, and plunge themselves by each deeper in misery. Even of the regular and diligent, the home labour is much of it employed on things useless or hurtful; the foreign trade, in importing superfluities. This procedure must as necessarily impoverish the public, as it must any single person, or number of persons: for the whole number of them is the public. And in such circumstances, whatever present show of strength and plenty there may be, is fallacious: like the over-full and florid look of a

diseased body, caused by too indulgent regimen; and under the superficial appearance of redundant health, betraying to the skilful evident symptoms of the most fatal distempers, already begun, if not far advanced.

Another thing, constantly and justly mentioned, as a main ingredient in political happiness, is liberty: an invaluable privilege; but often misunderstood, and still oftener abused. Absolute liberty, to do what we will, is absolute power. If one alone, or a few, have this, the rest are in slavery: if all have it, the whole must be in confusion. Liberty therefore, in order to preserve it, must be restrained by law, in whatever cases the exercise of it may affect others. And regulations by authority are necessary, not only to prevent mutual encroachments, but to ascertain each person's claims and expectations; and to instruct every one, what he is to do, and what to avoid, for the common benefit. Now legal provisions for these ends ought to be just and equitable, suited to the state of things, known and fixed. And those, which a nation makes for itself by its chosen representatives, are so very much the most likely to have these properties; that living, as we do, under a constitution purposely contrived for making, on every occasion, such as we want, is the greatest of civil blessings, provided we turn it not, by our fault, into a curse.

But to prevent this, besides care and impartiality in framing laws, there must be a general observation of them: else they were enacted in vain. Even such, as are in their nature the most variable, must be observed while they last. For not only the total neglect of them will frustrate their beneficial intent, and open a door to yet worse irregularities; but the

partial, besides having this unhappy effect in its degree, will introduce a very dangerous kind of inequality: good subjects must be losers by their obedience, and bad ones gainers by their transgression.

Still more essentially doth the common welfare consist in the practice of such rules of conduct, as are in themselves, and therefore always, obligatory: in abstaining from violence, fraud, promiscuous lewdness, intemperance, extravagance; in performing carefully the proper business of our several stations; in providing diligently what is needful for ourselves, and those who belong to us; in relieving the poor with prudent bounty; in behaving with respect to superiors, with condescension to inferiors, with friendliness to equals, with peculiar affection to those, whom either nature or voluntary ties have united to us more closely: these are the main things, on which social happiness depends. A nation may be small and weak and poor; and yet the persons who compose it, may enjoy their being very comfortably. But however great and powerful and rich it is, folly and wickedness will bring misery on each particular; which, put together, is general misery: and will besides gradually weaken and dissolve the whole. For the principal supports of a state, confessedly are, the numbers, and health, and strength, and industry, and probity, and concord, of the several members of it: all which good morals promote, and bad undermine.

But as human laws, in multitudes of instances, cannot punish, and much less prevent, the breach of moral obligations: the chief security of regard to them, in any society, must proceed from reverence of the divine laws. And as the precepts of Christianity are vastly more determinate, accompanied with

communications of far greater moral powers, and enforced by sanctions of unspeakably stronger terror to sinners, and sweeter consolation to pious minds, than the dictates of nature, unassisted by revelation: establishing a practical belief of the Gospel is securing and completing the provision of national felicity. This will, in all cases, restrain men from what is wrong, animate them in what is right, make them easy and happy under every suffering. Besides profession of the same faith and hope, and participation of the same worship and sacraments, must give so peculiar a sacredness and endearment to the bonds of civil union, that zeal in the common cause of our country and our religion, at once, will be intrepidly active, and indefatigably persevering *. *For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will wish thee prosperity: yea, because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good* †. Then to all the advantages, flowing naturally from piety, we cannot doubt but God will superadd his blessing, and withhold it from the profane; for his own words are, *Them that honour me, I will honour: and they, that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed* ‡. Nor must a further consideration ever be omitted, for it is a very important one; that unless true religion be cherished and practised, false religion will insinuate itself and prevail. For the mind of man must have some: as the experience of all ages proves, and our own particularly; amongst whom the increase of infidelity is accompanied with that of popery: an evil, which ought to be highly formidable to us; as it must of course, if ever it gain power enough, not only overturn our present happy establishment, but introduce

* Dion. Halic. Ant. Rom. l. ii. c. 23. † Psalm cxxii. 8, 9.
‡ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

the cruellest tyranny over the souls and bodies and estates of men.

Having now seen, wherein the public welfare consists, we should all with great seriousness consider,

II. How we are to express our regard to it. The manner, prescribed in the text, according to our translation, is, *Praying for the peace of Jerusalem:* according to others, asking or inquiring concerning its peace. Both imply, having it much at heart. And whatever we have deservedly at heart, ought jointly to engage our watchful solicitude, and our earnest petitions. I shall now begin with the first.

Pretences to public spirit, if they are not sincere, usually cover hurtful designs. Therefore we should examine ourselves closely, for self-deceit is wonderfully frequent, *of what spirit we* indeed *are* *: whether private passions or interests, concealed under specious appearances, do not influence our discourse and behaviour, perhaps our very thoughts. And, so far as we have need to know, we should make the same inquiry concerning others also: forming our opinions of them with charity, yet with caution. But, supposing the common good be ever so really our object and theirs: unless we understand well the tendencies of things, we may do it irreparable harm, instead of furthering it: and therefore should always be, according to St. James's admirable direction, *Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath* †: impartially diligent to learn the truth, where it is our business to judge and act; backward to meddle, where it is not; reasonable and moderate in all matters. But let us consider our duty more distinctly, in relation to the several articles, that were specified under the preceding head.

* Luke ix. 55. † James i. 19.

As defence against enemies is an essential ingredient in public happiness: rulers are bound to provide for it with vigilance, and subjects to contribute to it with cheerfulness; far from repining at necessary burdens, though heavy ones. But we ought to oppose with double vigour, from principle as well as interest, the deliberate, and habitual, and perfidious, and insolent disturbers of mankind: yet always remembering, that the only lawful aim, even in the justest war, is an equitable conclusion of it. *The Lord give strength unto his people, the Lord give his people the blessing of peace* * !

Again: as national wealth, and private plenty of the conveniences of life, are desirable in communities, but luxury and extravagance destructive to them: all persons, in their stations, ought so to promote the former, as to discourage the latter at the same time: which they will do most successfully, by setting examples to others of decent frugality, and attention to their own affairs; by honouring worthy characters, though in mean circumstances; and expressing in every proper way, dislike and contempt of baseness, debauchery, profusion, admiration of undeserving things, neglect of important ones; be they, who are guilty of such faults, ever so distinguished by their rank or accomplishments.

Further: as liberty is a blessing of inestimable value in society, it ought to be asserted with the utmost resolution and watchfulness, not only against open assaults, but every practice, that may secretly and silently impair it; yet with a religious care, neither to *use* it, nor unwarily assist others to *use* it, *for a cloke of maliciousness* †; nor hazard the destruction of it, by attempts of improving it to a visionary

* Psalm xxix. 10. † 1 Pet. ii. 16.

perfection. Therefore power, in a requisite degree, must both be allowed and diligently supported: they, in whose hands it is placed, must both be obeyed and humbly respected, *not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake* *; even the subordinate, much more the supreme: their whole conduct must be viewed with modesty and candour; their good actions and intentions acknowledged with due thankfulness; their mistakes and failings, imagined or real, borne with that mildness, of which we have all need, to excuse our own. And the same equitable temper should always be preserved between private persons, one towards another; were their differences about public affairs of ever much moment, whereas they are frequently nominal or trifling; and were they ever so sure of being in the right, whereas possibly both of them have reason to distrust it. This is the method, and it is the only one, by which we can ever hope to see *Jerusalem built as a city, that is at unity in itself* †.

Further yet: as good laws, and the observation of them, are necessary to the public welfare; all, who have a share in legislature, ought to contrive or assent to such, and oppose others, without suffering any consideration to bias them: all magistrates ought to execute them with uprightness and courage, yet with humanity; and all subjects, to obey them disinterestedly, and procure obedience to them zealously.

But the laws of morality require peculiar attention, for our country's good, as well as our own. Every person who transgresses these, *teaches* his neighbour, *teaches* his family, *an evil lesson against himself* ‡, in points of the greatest consequence. And every government, which connives at such transgres-

* Rom. xiii. 5. † Psalm cxxii. 3. ‡ Eccles. ix. 1.

sions, when it can safely punish them, connives at the ruin of the people intrusted to its care. But especially every free government, guilty of so culpable remissness, be it to court popularity, be it to serve what present turn it will, undermines the only ground it hath to stand upon. For without virtue, liberty cannot subsist.

Nor indeed without piety can virtue subsist. For our good affections are so weak, our bad inclinations so vehement, and the temptations of the world so numerous and enticing, that we need every possible preservative. And evidently the fear of God is the most awful restraint from doing ill: and the love of God the most delightful inducement to do well. True religion, therefore, must be established by the authority of the legislature, but with the tenderest regard to scrupulous consciences: and upheld in reputation by the countenance and example of the great. Its ministers must be industrious, and their superiors must see that they are, in teaching and defending it, and adorning their doctrine by respectable and amiable behaviour. Its professors must be assiduous attendants on its exercises in the congregation, and serious practisers of its injunctions at home.

But particularly, in both places, they must be earnest with God for their country's prosperity, and fervently *pray for the peace of Jerusalem.* Many can do little else: but all can do so much for it. In some of our endeavours to serve the public we may err: in this we are sure to be right. Often we know not, what is best for it: our heavenly Father always doth. Possibly in times of difficulty and danger we may be tempted to despair of the commonwealth: praying for it will remind us, that its fate is not in the hands of men, but of the Almighty. In all times,

resentments, interests, prejudices, frequently blind and mislead us: devout applications to Heaven will compose our passions, purify our intentions, obtain us light to guide our steps, and enlarge our views. Perhaps we have been diligent enough, or more than enough, in the use of other means, conducive, as we imagined, to public good: but have never, humbly and heartily, used this. And yet, if we believe a righteous Judge of the world, we must surely believe that he takes notice of the addresses, which his poor creatures, with pious affections, offer up to him. Or could we doubt it otherwise, we are fully assured of it in his sacred word. Not that naming our wants informs him, or acts of servile submission delight him, or unfit importunities prevail on him: but that praying *in spirit and in truth* *, while it seems intended to influence him only, hath a powerful influence on us: and by strengthening the sense it expresses, how dependent we are on his mercy, and what qualifications are needful to obtain it, fits us at the same time to receive it, and grow better by it: whereas bestowing his favours on those who are too negligent of him to ask for them, might neither be suitable to the holiness of his nature, and the honour of his government, nor indeed contribute to their final advantage. Why then should we not address ourselves to the Lord of all, not in outward form only, but inward reality: not merely at distant seasons appointed for it, like this, but every day of our lives; that he would graciously protect the community, of which we are members, and instruct and excite us to perform properly our duty towards it? His own declaration, even after he had promised a blessing, is: *I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it*

* John iv. 23.

for them *. And the direction of the prophet is, *Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth* †.

Affectionate vigilance therefore to do each his part for the service of the whole, and constant prayer, that God would *prosper the* united *work of his hands* ‡, are the genuine demonstrations of that regard, which we owe to the public welfare. Let us now consider,

III. What advantages will flow from expressing it in this due manner. *They shall prosper that love thee.* Worldly prosperity is designed to partake of the uncertainty of all worldly things: but so far as any thing on our part can secure it, a virtuous and pious public spirit must. Princes, magistrates, teachers of religion, military men, private persons of all ranks and professions, who thus express the love of their country, will be loved by it, and love one another. Such union will give them both the highest pleasure, and the greatest possible strength: nothing will be done to betray or thwart the general interest, but every thing imaginable to promote it; they will be bold in dangers, persevere through difficulties, furnish mutual assistance at any hazard: allies will know they can trust them; enemies will respect and dread them. Indeed they will have no enemies, but such as oppose truth and right: and therefore, when they are driven to war, they will consider themselves as fighting the battles of God. But usually they will enjoy peace, at home as well as abroad, and taste the comforts of it without allay: each delighting in the other's good; each feeling the tranquillity, the wealth, the honour of the community, as his own;

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37. † Isa. lxii. 6, 7. ‡ Psalm xc. 17.

and rejoicing with humble thankfulness, that his share in the production of it hath not been wanting. If such happiness be seldom seen, the reason is, that such dispositions towards it are seldom general. But let them be ever so uncommon, and affairs for want of them ever so unprosperous: whoever sacredly preserves them in himself, and faithfully exerts them when he can, *his soul shall prosper* *, as St. John expresses it: be filled with the consolation, that he hath meant and endeavoured well, though surrounded with examples and temptations to the contrary; and that none of the calamities that have happened or may happen, can be laid to his charge. Were he to be entirely deserted by other men, he would support himself by our Saviour's reflection: *Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me* †. Some, however, in the worst of times, will probably bear witness to him on earth: but God will certainly look down upon him with approbation from heaven; and bless him with a pleasing consciousness of his favour, the foretaste of future reward.

Let us now, on the other hand, contemplate the effects, I do not say of downright ill-will to the public, which few perhaps can be wicked enough to harbour knowingly, but of indifference, and preferring other considerations to its advantage. If persons in stations of trust, supreme or subordinate, regard empire, absolute power, profit, pleasure, indolence, as their felicity: inferiors will in proportion be sacrificed, oppressed, exhausted, neglected. If these inferiors are principally intent on their own private gratifications of any kind: even where they

* 3 John, ver. 2. † John xvi. 32.

have no share in the government, they will hurt it by serving it remissly or unfaithfully, and be miserable by unwilling subjection. But where the government is mixed, and divided between the sovereign, the nobles, and the representatives of the commonalty; as it cannot be carried on at all in that form, without professions on every side, of a patriot spirit: so in the degree, in which these professions are false, there will be a wide door open for supine mismanagement, selfish projects, corruption, treachery; the vilest of men will shelter themselves under plausible appearances and favourite names; and be supported by parties, which they have artfully raised or caressed. At the same time they who think they have the tenderest love for their country, perhaps will find on reflection, that in truth they love only the faction in which they have listed; or though it be their country, if they have not had tenderness enough for it, to examine coolly what conduct its interests require, they may accelerate its ruin, by increasing the fierceness of contention, and lending the reputation of their good meaning to colour over the bad designs of others. Free nations therefore, as they are the happiest beyond comparison, if the general advantage be the general object; so they are peculiarly uncomfortable, and exposed to danger from within and without, if divisions inflame men one against another, or the attention of each be confined to himself.

Still the *wise in their generation* * may imagine, that however impossible it be for the whole to prosper without the mutual affection of the parts, they shall prosper the better for throwing off a principle,

* Luke xvi. 8.

that will be always interfering with their interest or inclinations. But they cannot attempt to throw it off, or even contradict it in a single instance, without severely condemning themselves in their hours of recollection. Or if they could, they will be detected in spite of all disguise, and abhorred by others, and most by the worthiest: which gives the hardest hearts much greater uneasiness, than they are willing to own. Besides, through the mercy of Providence their wicked schemes often fail of answering their ends: and first to do wrong, and then be disappointed of their aim in it, is double ignominy. Punishment also not uncommonly overtakes even the securest criminal. But supposing the selfish wretch to succeed: that success will tempt or provoke many more to imitate him in hurtful designs and unfair methods. If they act in opposition to him, he may suffer, as he deserves, by the example he hath set: if they act in conjunction with him, ere long somewhat will disunite them. Or however, bad precedents naturally produce worse, and so they multiply continually; till at last the authors and encouragers of mischief are in their turn involved in it. But were they to escape for life, yet their posterity, whose advancement perhaps is the main point, which they have in view, must partake, it may be largely, in whatever the commonwealth is brought to suffer: besides the hereditary disgrace of springing from such ancestors. And, if ill people of every rank would consider, what figures their predecessors in wickedness make now in daily talk; and are likely to make hereafter in history, if they be of consequence enough; and in how very different a light men of probity are seen, when the transient mists,

that artifice, prepossession, and resentment have raised, are dispersed: surely it must have a beneficial influence on their conduct.

Or if none of these considerations can affect them, there is yet another of infinite moment. This life, at best, is short: and most of the busy actors on the stage of the world have probably but a small part of it to come, before a strict account of their behaviour in it is demanded. And will it be well for us then, think we, that, for the sake of purposes not to be owned, we have brought unjust reproach, uneasiness, distress on our brethren; and disquieted, weakened, impoverished, undone our common parent, whom nature and reason and revelation jointly require us to love and to serve? Or must it not be inexpressible happiness, for those in low stations to have discharged the duties of them with faithful affection, both to their rulers and their fellow-subjects: and for those in the highest to be able to say, with the excellent Jewish governor, *Think upon me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people* *?

If these be solid motives, let us all be moved by them: first, to use the utmost caution, that we do no harm to our country; next to try, what service we can do it; but especially to endeavour, for that we every one of us can, by virtuous lives, united hearts, and fervent prayers, to call down the divine benediction on our national counsels and undertakings. If indeed we consider worldly appearances only, we have great cause to fear: if we reflect on our many heinous iniquities, we have still much greater cause. But when we call to mind, what deliverances God hath often and lately bestowed on us, what warnings

* Neh. v. 19.

and what time he hath given us to repent, how slow and unwilling he appears to let our enemies proceed to our total destruction, it cannot but kindle in our breasts a most reviving persuasion, indeed *a full assurance of hope**, that would we but yet be unanimous and religious, we might yet by his blessing be safe and prosperous. And may *the Lord so bless us, that we may see Jerusalem in prosperity all our life long*†: *but let them be confounded and turned backward, as many as have evil will at Sion*‡.

* Heb. vi. 11. † Psalm cxxviii. 6. ‡ Psalm cxxix. 5.

SERMON IX.

PREACHED APRIL 25, 1749, ON THE THANKSGIVING FOR THE PEACE.

PSALM XXIX. 10.

——*The Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.*

WE are met this day to thank God for a mercy, that hath long been the object of our earnest wishes, and solemn prayers; that we have often had but small hope of obtaining, and yet now have possessed many months, with an increasing prospect of its continuance: on which account our joy is still more reasonable, though it must, from the constitution of our nature, be less warmly felt, than it was at first. Accordingly we have just been expressing it in the divine presence. And instruction from this place was not previously necessary, to excite our gratitude for a benefit, so visible and so important. But it may contribute, not a little, to fix in our breasts a more durable sense of what we have acknowledged: and, which is the end of all, direct us to such behaviour, as will secure and improve the happiness we enjoy.

I shall therefore at present,

I. Set before you the *blessing of peace.*

II. Shew you, that it is the *gift of God.*

III. Press you to remember, that only *his people*

are entitled to it: and consequently to consider, whether we are such; and to labour that we may, in the highest degree.

I. I shall set before you the *blessing of peace.*

Man appears, from the harmless make of his body, the conversable disposition of his mind, the tenderness of his affections, the sovereignty of his reflecting principle, the necessity of assistance in his numerous wants, and the rules of life prescribed him by express revelation, to be formed for a social inoffensive creature. Now the natural state of each being is the happy one. And the happiness of peace is like that of health: it spreads through the whole of the civil, as that doth of the animal constitution; and furnishes vigour and pleasure to every part, without being distinctly perceived in one more than another: for which reason we are apt to overlook the felicity of both, till the loss of them for a time renews our sense of their value; and even such experience usually doth not long preserve it in our memory. Therefore to discern sufficiently the advantages of peace, we must recollect the miseries of war.

To these we seldom attend farther, than we immediately feel them. And the generality feel only the expence: which indeed is a sore evil, and hath been for many years past, and must be for many to come, a heavy burden to us. Persons of low degree are sadly straitened by it in their enjoyment of the common comforts and necessaries of life. Their superiors, it is true, need only undergo a retrenchment of their superfluities: which they might bear, if they would, without much uneasiness, or any harm. But as too many of them are pleased to reckon their grandeur and luxury, their follies and

their vices, the most inseparable privileges of their rank; they must, by retaining these, be distressed equally with others, when the demands of the state are larger than ordinary. And as their usual resource is the very bad one, of supplying a fund for extravagance and immorality, by refusing acts of piety, charity, and justice; they force multitudes round them to suffer with them and for them. Frequently indeed the load of taxes may not be the cause of this dishonourable behaviour: but even then it is a plausible pretence and excuse for it. Nor doth the mischief stop at particular persons: but the public, exhausted by payments, and sunk under debts, becomes incapable of exerting itself, even for its own preservation, when future occasions require.

Yet, melancholy as these things are, an article much more shocking, and which ought to be the first in our thoughts, is that of the various and continual toils and hardships, that must be endured by such numbers of poor creatures, exposing themselves in defence of others, through so long a course of time: the loss of so many thousands of lives by sickness and in battle; the grief of so many relations and friends, the miseries of so many destitute families: part of these, our fellow-subjects; not a few of them possibly very dear to one or other of us; a second part, our allies; the rest, called indeed enemies: but it may be scarce any of them in fault for that enmity, how much soever their rulers are; and all of them, in truth, our brethren; of the same blood, and, in essentials, the same faith, though taught them with a mixture of dangerous errors.

Further still: war not only weakens and afflicts a community in these respects, but interrupts the freedom of commerce, retards the propagation of

esteem them very great ones: and every pious heart will most seriously mourn, that *the worthy name, by which we are called, is blasphemed among the Gentiles* *, through the sins, and peculiarly the enmities, of those who profess the Gospel; instead of its producing that *glory to God, peace on earth, and good-will amongst men,* which angels proclaimed at our Saviour's birth †.

Still this dreadful evil, big with so many more, becomes, by the obstinate iniquity of men, sometimes unavoidable. It must be the will of the common Father of all, that societies, as well as single persons, be restrained from committing material injuries: else destructive ones would be committed perpetually. Now certainly amicable methods are to be tried in the first place: but often the only effectual method of restraint is by arms: and then, *the minister of God,* the supreme power, *must not bear the sword in vain* ‡. Often again, treaties made to support allies, if unjustly attacked, are probably means of preserving peace: and when that proves otherwise, the assistances promised must be given, in order to restore it. But above all, when a nation is directly attacked itself, defence is undeniably necessary. And our case, in the late war, was compounded of all these. We have therefore the comfort, that our undertaking it was justifiable: and our manner of carrying it on, I trust, no way peculiarly blamable. But it could never be lawful to refuse any equitable, any tolerable conditions of agreement, for putting an end to so much guilt and misery. Whether those, which we have accepted, are desirable, is not a question to be discussed here. You have decided

* James ii. 7. Rom. ii. 24. † Luke ii. 14.
‡ Rom. xiii. 4.

gracious motives, which induced him to make the world, must certainly induce him to be attentive to it. And the attention of an infinite mind must comprehend the regulation of every thing, even the smallest: but affairs of such momentous consequence, as peace and war, cannot fail to occupy a distinguished place in the scheme of Providence.

These deductions of reason our condition of late years hath obliged me more than once to lay before you: but still they need to be inculcated. Passages of Scripture too, confirming them, I have produced to you in great numbers: but it is very easy, and would God it were not necessary, to add yet more. *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things* *. *The heart of kings is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivulets of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will* †. *The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand* ‡. And on the contrary, *shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it* § ?

Frequently indeed we perceive no marks of the interposition of God in what passes. But we are both inadvertent and short-sighted: ignorant, not only of the secret springs and material circumstances of many human actions, but yet more, beyond comparison, of principal purposes in the divine administration. Yet this however we know, that he is incessantly conducting the affairs of the present world, towards a full display of his wisdom, justice and goodness, in the next: though often by steps invisible to our eyes, and improbable to our imaginations. *For his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out* ¶. Therefore in all things we

* Isaiah xlv. 7. † Prov. xxi. 1. ‡ Psalm cxxi. 5.
§ Amos iii. 6. ¶ Rom. xi. 33.

should believe a providence; but in many we may see it: and very plainly in our own case: to whom true religion and liberty have been so wonderfully preserved, in the midst of such imminent dangers; and quiet and safety so unexpectedly restored, when *the help of man was* confessedly *vain* *. Nor did God only bestow the blessing, but it is he who continues it: and every day's peace, as well as every day's bread, is a gift from him.

Surely then we have cause, not for joy alone, but thankfulness too, from the bottom of our hearts. And if we ungratefully disown, or negligently forget, the Author of our happiness, what is it likelier, what is it fitter he should do, than deprive us of it again? We may think perhaps, that we have fully discharged our consciences towards him by our attendance on the present solemnity. And God grant we may hear, it hath been every where universally attended. But supposing that: outward acknowledgments singly are downright pageantry and mockery. Nay, indeed sense of obligation along with them, if it bring not forth suitable and lasting obedience, is imperfect, inefficacious, delusive homage, which our Maker cannot accept. *Herein is my Father glorified,* saith our blessed Saviour, *that ye bear much fruit* †. And thus we are to understand that awful denunciation: *If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will send a curse upon you, and I will even curse your blessings* ‡. Accordingly the text very clearly intimates,

III. That to entitle ourselves to *the blessing of peace,* we must be *his people;* own his authority by observing his laws.

* Psalm cviii. 12. † John xv. 8. ‡ Mal. ii. 2.

The practice of religion and virtue makes nations industrious, frugal, rich, healthy, populous, unanimous, public-spirited, fearless; yet at the same time, just, prudent, friendly: which are the very qualities that constitute them formidable enemies, desirable confederates, inoffensive neighbours; and, so far as any thing can, will secure them peace. But wickedness impoverishes, enfeebles, dispirits, depopulates, disunites; extinguishes concern for common good, inflames selfish appetites and passions; renders men rash and provoking, yet indolent and despicable. It seems hardly needful for Providence to interpose, otherwise than it hath done in the original appointment of things, to exalt a people of the former character, or depress one of the latter. But when it is, we may expect it to be done. For God will reward what he loves, punish what he hates. And though his recompenses are neither perfect nor proportionable, they are real and considerable, even here. Experience hath found it: Scripture hath foretold it. The Jewish nation indeed prospered or suffered, according to their doings, more constantly and equally, than others. But still, not only *these things happened to them for our ensamples, and are written for our admonition* *: but in the same ages, God visited the heathen also for their iniquities; *and lengthened their tranquillity,* when they *broke off their sins by righteousness* †. Christian states, we confess, as they were not in being, are not mentioned, in the Gospels or Epistles: but *godliness hath the promise* there *of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come* ‡: and the Revelation of St. John, a prophetical work, describes whole kingdoms, and yet larger portions of the earth, as undergoing the severest of temporal

* 1 Cor. x. 11. † Dan. iv. 27. ‡ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

judgments, for the abominations which they had committed. We ought to be deeply affected therefore by every declaration of God's purposes in this respect throughout his word. And the sum of them is: *if ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it* *.

Which then is our case? Are we God's people? Are we even sensible what that phrase implies? That we believe, not a presumptuous scheme of falsely-called rational religion, framed by our fancies, but the *mystery of the Gospel* †: that we practice, not an arbitrary system of polite morals, indulgently relaxed to sit easy upon our inclinations, but all those duties, in their genuine strictness, which *the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, came to teach: denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; and looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works* ‡. Do we know ourselves by this picture? or is not the very different one, which I have so often been obliged to set before you, still our true resemblance? Are we not regardless in general, both of a present providence and of future rewards? Have not many of us cast off with scorn, and most of us contributed to loosen, those ties of faith and worship, which in every country else, and in this till of late, have always been held necessary, even to civil welfare? They, who have not rejected religion, do they not however, numbers of them, slight the exercises of

* Isa. i. 19, 20. † Eph. vi. 19. ‡ Tit. ii. 11—14.

it, wholly in private, and to a great degree in public? Nay, such as appear pretty regular in them, and seem to have a real sense of piety, have they any zeal for it, any sorrow for the decay of it? Do they not feel and express more dislike and contempt of those whom they think, and perhaps but think, *righteous overmuch**, than of the most thoughtless about their spiritual state, not to say, the most abandoned? Are we not in common life dissolute, expensive, negligent of our affairs, our families, our very children, at least in the most important point, their principles; overrun by an epidemical rage for hourly pleasures and amusements, with an utter contempt of consequences, which, after infecting almost universally the upper, and next to them the middle part of the world, is yearly spreading wider among those, whose parsimony and useful industry is the wealth of the nation? Are we not also in our political capacities, how irreconcileably soever we differ, lamentably alike: void of reverence to authority, subordinate or supreme; attentive chiefly, if not only, to selfish or party considerations, varnished over with transparent pretences of public good; vehement about disputable matters, unconcerned about confessedly necessary ones; each denomination, each order and rank, bitterly accusing the other, and none ever thinking in earnest to amend themselves: extremely afraid of hurting liberty by restraining wickedness, but not at all of being undone by indulging it; wonderfully jealous of the power of our own church, which hath and desires less, than ever any other in any age; but perfectly easy about the daily growth of popery, the most tyrannical empire over soul and body that can be, and the most peculiarly formidable to this coun-

* Eccl. vii. 16.

try? *My people is foolish, they have not known me: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no understanding* *.

Can such a nation hope for the favour of Providence? Could it flourish, even were there no Providence? Evidently it is impossible. Sentiments of religion and virtue are the seeds of all happiness, the security in all danger, the support in all affliction. These are decaying apace, and wearing quite out. Habits of prudence, formed by a careful education, might in some poor measure supply their place. But we have them not. In trifles indeed we are bred up to a strict observance of rules and forms and fashions: but in points of consequence every one is left, from his early youth, to do as he pleases; and they most, whose example will be most followed. General dislike and shame however might restrain persons, when they come out into the world, from several vices, against which they had no preservative before. But with us, there are few vices or none, of which any body needs be ashamed: the most notoriously guilty of the worst, are as well received in all places, if not better, than other persons. Yet, even in such a state, strict laws, vigorously executed, might deter at least from the more immediately mischievous crimes. But we are destitute of this guard also. A great part of our laws, from the universal remissness of the times, are scarce executed at all: and, from the nature of our constitution, cannot be executed so effectually, as where power is less bounded. Still this constitution, with its many defects, especially under a prince, who, God be thanked, most cordially wishes the continuance and improvement of that and every advantage to his subjects, amply compensates for many inconveniences; and pre-

* Jer. iv. 22.

serves many valuable privileges, not enjoyed elsewhere. But then such inward disorders must by degrees impair and undermine it, till at length it will fall: possibly the sooner, the more safely we think we can follow our own devices. Peace may be no blessing to such, as will abuse it: and the Scripture hath told us long ago, that *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them* *. After all, it would be something, if when we had reduced ourselves to the same condition with the rest of the world, in point of freedom at home, by our unworthiness and incapacity of it, we had a prospect remaining of security from abroad. Other nations, neither free nor virtuous; though internally miserable on both accounts, continue for a time, perhaps a considerable one, to answer purposes of God's wisdom, externally potent, courted and dreaded. But what consolation can we draw from hence: exhausted and burthened as we are; with so little to hope, as experience hath shewn us, even from the friendlier part of our neighbours; and so much to apprehend from the nearest and most powerful, who hath repeatedly attempted our destruction, whose strength in the only weak article will be recruited with zeal and indignation, to whose designs we have always been the chief obstacle, and whose success in them must be fatal both to our religious and civil interests?

Think not, that *I am become your enemy, because I tell you the truth* †. Would God it would permit me to say every thing that was pleasing to you. Think not, that I delight, or even mean, to foretel evil: I mean only to caution you against it. And who shall or will, if the ministers of God's word do not? And what must follow? *I have seen*, saith he himself,

* Prov. i. 32. † Gal. iv. 16.

in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing—they strengthen the hands of evil-doers, that none doth return from his wickedness.—They say unto them, that despise me, the Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; unto every one, that walketh in the imagination of his own heart, no evil shall come upon you.—Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury: it shall fall grievously on the head of the wicked.—But if they had stood in my council, and caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way *. Think not, that, however, such language might be spared on this day of rejoicing. It might so indeed, had we either been hitherto innocent, or were now duly penitent. But, being such, as God knows we are, admonition of our faults is indispensably necessary, to excite our thankfulness, that we are not punished in proportion to them: and warning of our dangers, to remind us of proving our gratitude by that obedience, which alone will obtain us protection. Would we but make this use of the present solemnity, then it would be a day of gladness indeed: a day, *much to be observed unto the Lord through all our generations* †, for laying the only ground-work of public happiness. And therefore I must repeat to you on the conclusion of this war, what I earnestly recommend to your consideration at the beginning of it, that when Asa king of Judah was returning home, both with peace and victory, the prophet *Azariah went out to meet him, and said: Hear ye me Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you: but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you* ‡.

* Jer. xxxiii. 14. 17. 19. 22. † Exod. vii. 42.
‡ 2 Chron. xv. 1, 2.

Other methods to support a tottering or raise a sinking state, without reformation, frequently overturn it: and at best are only palliatives, temporary expedients, to delay a little its final ruin. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts,—They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace* *. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked* †. And not only the sacred writings have said this: but heathens have said it who knew them not: infidels have said it, who regard them not: innumerable facts have proclaimed it in every age. But above all it holds in limited governments, like ours. There must be public virtue, or they cannot stand. There must be private virtue, or there cannot be public. There must be religion, or there can be neither. There must be true religion, or there will be false. There must be attendance on God's worship, or there will be no religion at all. Not four years ago it was universally doubted, whether we had principle enough, of any kind, left, to make an effort for the preservation of every thing valuable to us. Most happily more appeared, than was expected. Yet God knows how it had proved, if the trial had gone but a little further. And for God's sake let us provide as much as ever we can, against the next. How soon it may happen, is beyond human foresight. But in the mean while, we have some leisure, not only for personal amendment, which is equally possible in all seasons, but for concerting schemes, and executing, as well as framing, laws for public reformation. In war, many things, confessed to be right and necessary, are put off, because the attention must be confined to the immediate danger. And if they are put off in peace too, because

* Jer. vi. 9. 14. † Isa. lvii. 21.

there is no immediate danger, when are they to be minded? and what will be the consequence, if they never are?

I would by no means excite a rash and ignorant zeal, to be meddling where we see not to the bottom of things: much less a factious one, to cramp and embarrass, disquiet and inflame. These practices must be hurtful: they may be pernicious: and the first article in true patriotism is conscientiously abstaining from them. Taking unwarrantable steps, in opposition to such as we may think, whether too hastily or not, bad men and bad measures, is only introducing additional wickedness of our own, and giving others a pretence for continuing, and even increasing theirs. Or should we succeed against them: yet such, as act ill to get power to act well, seldom or never use it to that purpose, when they have it, whatever they may intend beforehand.

The rule then is, that each perform his own duty steadily and calmly; rejoice, and acknowledge it with thankfulness, when others perform theirs; and be very moderate, when he apprehends they overlook or transgress it; endeavour to rectify what is wrong, so far as it belongs to his station, but *never exercise himself in matters, which are too high for him**, nor watch more solicitously over the conduct of the state, than over his own heart and life. He, that neglects the latter, will seldom be thoroughly in earnest, and seldomer yet impartial, about the former: or though he were, will have much less weight than a better man. The one is incumbent on us all; the other on very few: in the one we need never mistake or fail; in the other we must frequently. Therefore let us earnestly *pray for the peace of Je-*

* Psalm cxxxi. 2.

rusalem *: but remember that the surest way of *seeking to do it* further *good* †, is first to be at peace ourselves with God and with men.

Pressing you to general reformation, as the means of general happiness, may seem a very hopeless expedient. But it is the only one which Heaven hath pointed out, or will bless. Whether you will make use of it, depends on yourselves. We are *charged, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, to preach the word; be instant, in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering, and doctrine* ‡. We do accordingly, *as ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God* §: and when we have done so, *we have delivered our souls* ‖: but we beg you, think of your own. The fewer will amend, the more need there is, that we should add to the number. Our doing it may be of some benefit to others, we know not how great: but at least will be infinitely beneficial to ourselves. We shall be happy, whatever they be: happy even at present; though less, than if all were so. Probably, indeed, when times of trouble come, we shall suffer with them: but possibly not, or however not so much as we apprehend: *For the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation* ¶. Or if he determine otherwise, he will *enable us to bear it* **; and *suffering* now *according to his will* ††, is a title to more enjoyment in a better life. This world is not our main concern. They, who take it for their portion, will be every one anxiously providing for his own sepa-

* Psalm cxxii. 6. † Psalm cxxii. 9. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.
§ 2 Cor. v. 20. ‖ Ezek. xxxiii. 9. ¶ 2 Pet. ii. 9.
** 1 Cor. x. 13. †† 1 Pet. iv. 19.

rate advantage in it; and consequently every one injurious to his neighbours, and uneasy in himself: but let felicity hereafter be the point in view, and tranquillity here will be the result. *The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ* *. Even if we suffer, not only in common with others, but more than others; if we are despised, hated, ill-treated, for what ought to procure us honour and friendship, our piety, integrity, regularity; still the spirit within us will support us; *we shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life* †. *Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him* ‡.

Doubtless good persons will be sorry, as they have cause, for what the public must undergo, unless reformation prevent it. But at the same time they will acquiesce, as they have cause, with entire complacency, in the justice of Providence: and the more, as the severest dispensations of it are bringing forward continually, though by unseen ways, that blessed state of things, even on this earth, of which, however else improbable in itself, the attributes of God afford us hope; and his prophets, assurance. Nay, those nations themselves, whom by his punishments he makes miserable for being bad, may by that very misery be made good, and then happy. *I will leave in the midst of thee,* saith God to Jerusalem, *an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity,*

* Phil. iv. 7. † Mark x. 30.
‡ Isa. iii. 10, 11.

nor speak lies. It follows, *they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid* *.

Such a cure, though effected by such discipline, would be an unspeakable blessing. But surely we are not resolved, that no other shall do. God is trying at present milder methods: and the language of his proceedings is, *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?—Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together* †. But still in the midst of his mercies, his threatenings remain in full force: and we have a solemn warning, that *if, when we hear the words of his curse, we bless ourselves, and say, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts:—the Lord will not spare us, but his anger and his jealousy shall smoke against us; and all the curses that are written in his book, shall lie upon us* ‡. For a long time we seemed to think, that we might securely trust in our own wealth and strength, our own policy and bravery, let us behave to our Maker as we would. He hath given us, through a course of years, ample conviction of our mistake, if any thing will convince us: and he hath given us now time to act upon that conviction. Let us therefore at length intitle ourselves to trust in him: turn our minds *to fear God, honour the king, love the brotherhood* §, that is, the public: cease from our profane discourse, our unbelieving presumption, our uncharitable contentions, our selfish projects, our dissolute pleasures, our idle amusements, our fashionable affectations, our destructive expences: beg pardon of our guilt, through Jesus Christ; and assistance of our weakness, through the Spirit of grace: govern our lives by the rules of the Gospel; and both awe and

* Zeph. iii. 12, 13.
† Hos. xi. 8.
‡ Deut. xxix. 19, 20.
§ 1 Pet. ii. 17.